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from the desk of...

BY VIRTUE OF some of the memos Vince McMahon has circulated at Titan Tower, it was very clear in the days following the October 21 *Raw* how the boss felt about the necrophilia angle. He loved it. Which meant that you were not going to hear a negative peep from the rank-and-file.

Most WWE wrestlers simply would not comment on it—at least not on the record. Some extended their necks an inch, rationalizing the segment by comparing it to themes explored on other (socially acceptable) TV shows, or they'd claim that it was not to be taken as seriously as it was. Nobody was going to cross the boss on this sensitive issue. Not that they wouldn't want to ... but let's face it, there aren't too many people willing to play "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin in real life.

So I'll save someone's job and write a little letter to VKM on behalf of every WWE superstar who might be brave enough to do a moonsault, but quakes every time a McMahon walks past.

* * *

Dear Vince,

We've gone through some tough times here over the last year, and we've all paid the price for a downturn in the economy and the sports entertainment market. I'm not trying to blow smoke, but it is reassuring to know that the same man who was smart enough to build this business to undreamed-of heights is still there, with a passion for his company and dedicated to the well-being of us all.

Nobody is perfect, but there is nobody who is better equipped to turn things around than you. Sure, you have tried some things that did not work, but you were never so full of pride that you could not take a few steps back and try again. Some of the guys in the so-called wrestling press might take their shots, but, geez, even they have to know that you're the one that butters their bread. Most importantly, we know that you are here for us and you've done everything you can to do right by each and every one of us.

Right now, Vince, most of the Boys are upset. This whole necrophilia thing really crossed the line. In fact, I have to say, with all due respect, it took the focus off what sports entertainment is supposed to be: fun. Triple-H didn't build heat with Kane. People weren't angry with him on behalf of Kane or Katie Vick. They were shocked and insulted by what happened on *Raw* and were venting at us all.

Vince, I'm a parent, and there are things that we do that I wouldn't want my kid to see. That's okay. I agree that it's up to parents to play an active role in deciding what's right for their kids. But even though we put a warning out before the scene, nobody could have expected this. And what about the kids that were in the building. What choice did their parents have?

I understand that you were pissed that the mainstream media did not pick up on this. I say, thank God it didn't. Having Matt Lauer asking Triple-H about this on *The Today Show* would not be like him interviewing Chuck and Billy. You've got grapefruits, Vince, but aren't you even a little afraid of the backlash that would have brought?

We realize you want to give *Raw* and *Smackdown* separate personalities, but we've got the best damn athletes this sport has ever seen on both rosters, and that's the best thing we have going for us. Wouldn't it be best if we just played to our strengths for a while? Controversy may get people talking, but shouldn't we be concerned with what it is they're saying?

People love the WWE because we are cool. Vince, screwing dead people is not cool.

Respectfully,
John Q. Superstar

Stu Saks
Publisher

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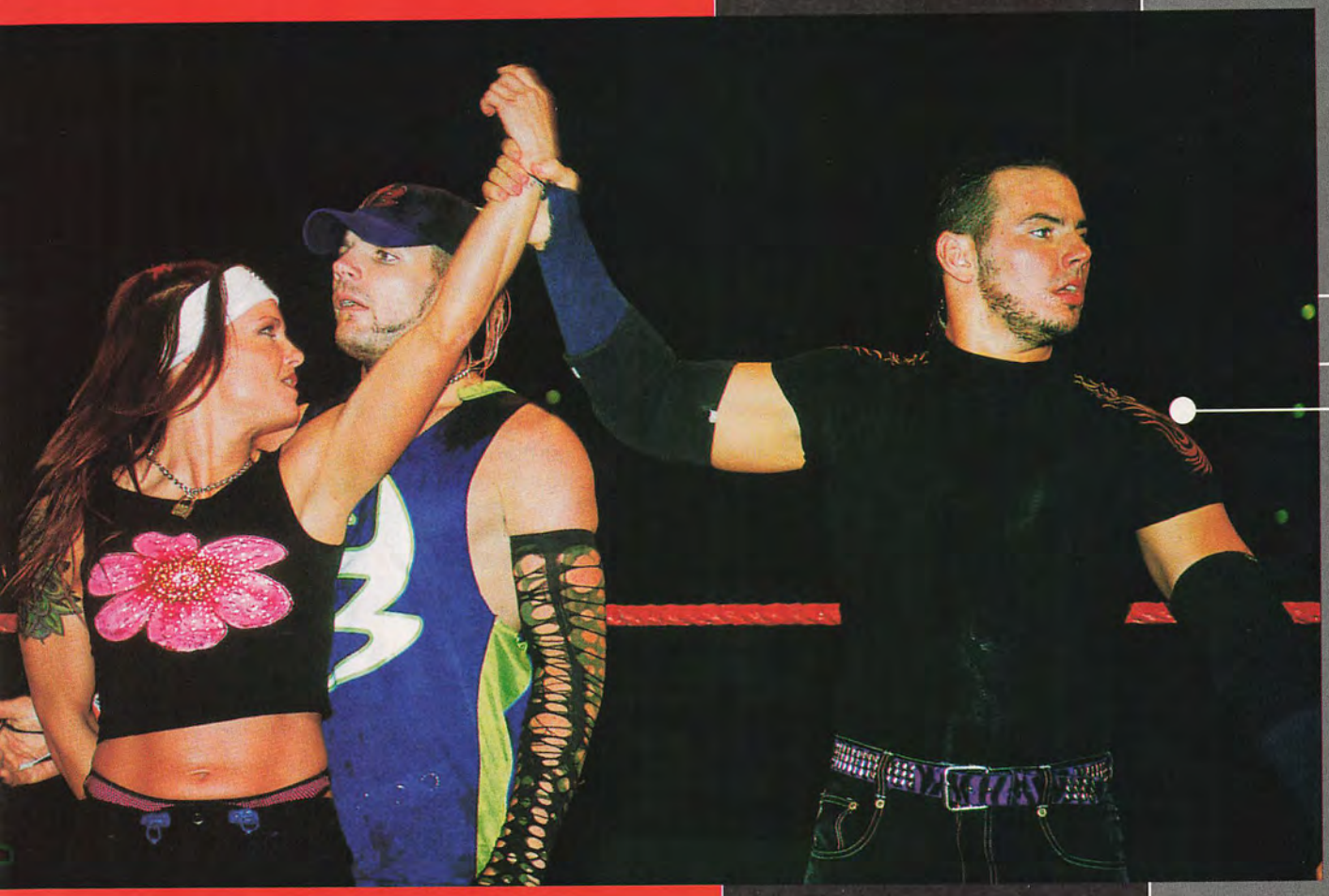

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before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

Dolls For Guys!

We know that the majority of wrestling fans who read this magazine are guys. They're big, macho, completely insensitive lummoxes who delighted in making fun of their sisters' Cabbage Patch Kids and always jokingly suggested that perhaps Barbie should be made to look even more anatomically correct.

Sickos!

Of course, what each one of those guys hid during all his years as the family's head tormentor was the fact that he was playing with dolls, too. Plastic dolls, with moveable arms and legs and big, burly weapons that only the toughest of the tough could carry in their preformed ninja-like grips. And just like Cabbage Patch Kids, these dolls had special names, too ... and weird ones at that. What exactly is a Snake Eyes or an Optimus Prime anyway?

These dolls, otherwise known as "action figures"—a word that marketing people use to make you believe that you're further away from playing with Ken then you really are—continue to be popular. G.I. Joes and Transformers still abound, as do line upon line of superhero action figures. And if you venture into any toy store, you'll soon see that one of the biggest action figure lines belongs to none other than WWE.

Just recently, a completely new line of WWE superstars hit the market, and if you ask us, they lay the smack down on the rest of the competition. Brought to store shelves by JAKKS Pacific, the WWE Trash Talkin' Champions line features the ultimate in "back talking" technology. Featuring Kurt Angle and Chris Jericho, two of the best talkers that WWE has to offer, each figure has three—count 'em, *three!*—championship belts with its own audio technology that plays back actual trash-talking from WWE programming. You simply press the belt and the seven-inch figure turns his head, raises his microphone, and starts talkin' trash as if he were live on *Raw* or *Smackdown.* We're talking *hours* of quality entertainment here!

It's all pretty cool—if you don't mind playing with dolls, that is. We give the new *action figures* four suplexes out of a possible five.

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related things you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each:

10. Lennox Lewis has talks with WWE regarding possible showdown (fight ... match?) with Brock Lesnar. This must be a joke. Mike Barton (Bart Gunn) still hasn't recovered from his "Brawl For All" bout with Butterbean. That was what, three years ago?

9. Kane and Katie Vick. Get ready for the return (and huge push!) of Scott "Sick Boy" Vick!

8. *Tough Enough III.* How much do you wanna bet that both *TE III* champions make it to WWE's main roster before Jackie Gayda makes her return?

7. Triple-H and Ric Flair. Is that Trips standing next to "Naitch," or is it David Flair in flesh-colored water wings?

6. Vince McMahon mentions the possibility of someday bringing back ECW. Yeah, that's exactly what we need, a third half-assed brand under the WWE banner.

5. Ring of Honor and Combat Zone Wrestling form alliance as independent turf wars in Philadelphia area escalate. Welcome to Code of Honor Hardcore Wrestling, where after you bash your opponent over the head with a fluorescent light tube or two, you shake his hand and wish him well.

4. Test and Stacy Keibler. Must be the hair.

3. NWA champion Ron Killings is attacked by a man in a white hood during pay-per-views. When did NWA-TNA become NWA-KKK?

2. Test and Christian, the two long-haired members of The Un-Americans, reportedly refuse to cut their hair. The Un-Americans are subsequently disbanded. Well, at least we could understand why Test might refuse to cut his hair. (See above.)

1. *WWE Anthology* CD set. Just what you need, three more CDs of music that you're too embarrassed to listen to in public.

The Internet Insider

The following news items were culled from various wrestling-related Web sites—or were they? See if you can pick out the two news items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean that they are true) and the two that we blatantly made up. The answer appears at the end of the column on page 11.

1. Despite an *overwhelmingly* negative reaction to the Triple-H/Kane/Katie Vick necrophilia storyline by WWE insiders and wrestling's viewing public, Vince McMahon was so incredibly happy with the storyline that he stubbornly circulated a memo to WWE office staffers letting them know that he thoroughly enjoyed it and was in favor of its continued usage.

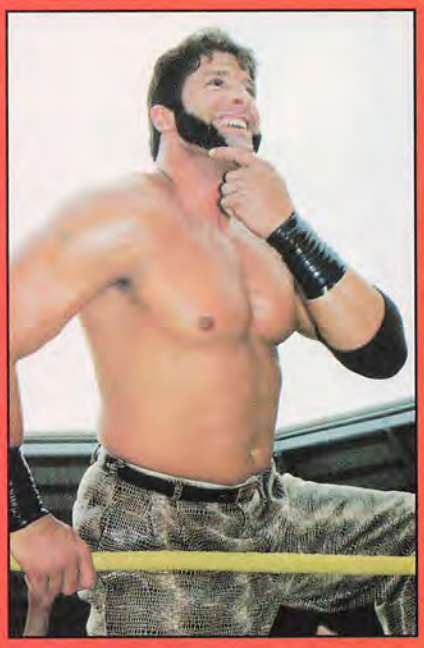
2. In a last-minute decision, Triple-H has been cast to play the role of The Incredible Hulk for the 2003 movie *The Hulk.* The character of The Hulk was supposed to be brought to life by computer animation, but an office fire at Industrial Light and Magic destroyed many of the computers working on the project. Eric Bana is secure in his role as Dr. Bruce Banner, but Helmsley will don The Hulk's green makeup. As a result of the last-minute change, which will require Triple-H to miss some ring time after WrestleMania, the release of the film has been pushed back from next summer to Thanksgiving weekend.

3. Apparently the failed reformation of the New World Order didn't wake WWE up to the fact that the past should remain there. The Four Horsemen will likely be making a return ... again. Triple-H will head up the group, while Ric Flair will take on more of a J.J. Dillon-type managerial role. Randy Orton and Batista will round out the foursome. WWE is also in talks with Bret Hart and The Road Warriors.

4. The Hurricane was recently a featured guest at a comic book convention in Anaheim, California. Also on hand were Lynda Carter (who played Wonder Woman in the 1970s TV series), Adam West (who was Batman in the 1960s TV series), and Liz Vassey (who played Captain Liberty in the 2001 TV series *The Tick).* Hurricane had the longest autograph line of them all, and when West saw this, he asked who The Hurricane was. Upon finding out that a WWE superstar was in higher demand than he was, West stormed out of the convention and failed to show for the event's final two days.

The Stupid Files

Sports Illustrated recently ran an item on WWE's decline in popularity. The respected weekly sports news publication basically said that the HLA and Billy and Chuck commitment ceremony angles are the precursor to wrestling's complete collapse. That's almost as ridiculous as saying that *Sports Illustrated's* coverage of WWE means that sport as we know is it on the verge of collapse ... Can someone explain how Rosie and Jamal wound up with Rico as their manager? He's funny, but we'd never describe the guy as thuggish ... A thought: The Triple-H/Kane/Katie Vick storyline should have been killed the second that fans in Montreal started screaming "What?!" as Kane stammered through an explanation of why he was innocent.



As this issue was going to press, Japan's Pro Wrestling NOAH promotion was scheduled to run a Halloween show during which all the wrestlers would wrestle in masks and costumes. How much would you be willing to bet that if the same stunt was undertaken stateside by Vince McMahon, the show would be universally panned and the idea for the show would somehow be traced back to Vince Russo? ... Speaking of Russo, there are rumors coming out of NWA-TNA that indicate that Russo, a member of the promotion's creative team, and Jerry Jarrett, a co-owner of the promotion, might be in the midst of a rivalry and that TNA wrestlers are starting to take sides. Our advice to the wrestlers if this is true: Side with Jarrett. He owns the dang promotion.

On September 30, Jerry "The King" Lawler and Jim Ross made a point to belittle *Monday Night Football, Raw's* main competition, throughout the broadcast. Forgive us, but we don't understand why WWE would attempt such shenanigans. All it did was encourage many *PWI* staffers to switch over to ABC to check out the score of the game, and we bet the same thing happened in thousands of other households. Not surprisingly, neither Al Michaels nor John Madden took shots at WWE in return ... It's nice to see that WWE has finally settled on a name for Faarooq, a.k.a. Ron Simmons, a.k.a. Simmons, a.k.a. Ron. Now if we could only remember what name the company settled on ...

Welcome to the Joanie Laurer paragraph. New Japan Pro Wrestling took a big chance on bringing in Laurer, who successfully portrayed Chyna in WWE. So far, opinion on whether signing her to play a prominent heel role was a good move by Antonio Inoki has been mixed, and here's why: Apparently in an attempt to make all those hardcore Japanese fanatics who also appreciate shootfighting take her seriously, Laurer wore a pair of white chaps over a thong bikini bottom and bikini top as ring attire ... After wrestling, defeating, and *spanking* Laurer, former IWGP heavyweight champion Masahiro Chono was asked if he'd give Laurer a rematch. Chono's reply: "Only if she gets a sex change."

An interesting note from Puerto Rico, where wrestling has not yet pulled back the curtain: Former WCW wrestler Konnan is hated so passionately on the island that he recently had to hide in a cage after being defeated by Carly Colon in a steel cage match because a number of fans stormed the ring in an effort to continue the beatdown.

We Heard That!

"But my God, I think at the same time that they have a lot of joy in trying to produce a good product. They don't always get on base. They don't always hit a home run, but they [expletive] go down swinging. They don't let the ball just go past them."

—Syxx-Pac, discussing NWA-TNA management and wrestlers, in an interview with the *Pro Wrestling Torch*

"It's not that [the Raw writers] need to find more people to wrestle—it's that they need to efficiently use the talent that they have. And I don't feel as though they are being utilized."

—Lita (a member of the Raw brand), discussing why she prefers the Smackdown brand to Raw, in an interview with WWE.com

"[WWE] is woven into the fabric of America. We're not going anywhere."

—Vince McMahon, in an interview with *Sports Illustrated*

"I remember Kevin Nash. He was tremendous. Kevin

could jump, do everything. I remember him like it was yesterday. He was a hot player."

—Basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson, in an interview with *Sports Collector's Digest*

"That's ridiculous … you're a weakling."

—David Letterman, to David Arquette, upon learning that Arquette had once captured the WCW World heavyweight title, during CBS' *The Late Show With David Letterman*

"Let me tell you, the people in the business may be upset with me about this because I told all I knew about the business. But nobody early in the business gave me insurance or profit-sharing. I kept all the promoters alive because I was a hell of a worker. What it boils down to is that there is no business. It's just an acting job."

—Bobby Heenan, in an interview with wrestlingobserver.com

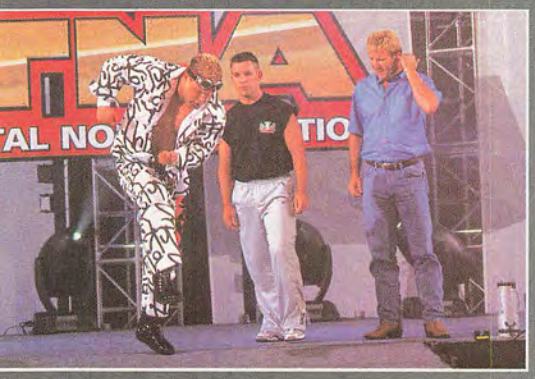
NOVEMBER'S BEST

"Dang! That feller's already doin' the Tennessee spider stomp, and I ain't even got the bug outta my ear yet!"

—Jeff Tuttle, Hudson, FL

"You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, you put your left foot in, and you shake it all about …"

—Jim Bradley, Jackson, NJ



"Hey, man. We just some country white boys. We don't know nothin' 'bout no rap dancin' music."

—Jeff Judd, heluvajobu@yahoo.com

Sterling Marlin thinking, *So that's how you do that move!*

—Laurel Register, Carrollton, GA

"Wow, Hermie, he *does* dance better than Jeff Gordon!"

—Steve Kardolly, Olanta, PA

caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors here at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This photo of Vince McMahon blindly pointing at … well … something needs a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to PWIFocus@aol.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three months from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better.

"It didn't work for Buff. It isn't going to work for your stuff!"

—Denise Carter, Stony Plain, Alberta

When asked about his career, Brian demonstrated and replied, "This is the way you dig your grave, dig your grave, dig your grave …"

—Mike E. Breaks, HEARnoEvol@aol.com

Answers to Internet Insider:

Items 2 and 4 are totally made up.

ringside

With Will Welsh

ON OCTOBER 21, 2002, I did something that I never really thought that I would do: I turned off *WWE Raw* in utter disgust. I simply couldn't watch it anymore.

In case you don't remember that night (how could you forget if you saw it?), here's a quick refresher course: One week earlier, Raw champion **Triple-H** accused **Kane** of murdering an ex-girlfriend, **Katie Vick**, 10 years ago. Then he accused Kane of raping Vick. Then he accused him of raping Vick's corpse.

WWE's attempts to make what had been a fairly uninspired feud between Kane and Triple-H more spirited and interesting certainly got wrestling fans talking. Too bad not many of them were talking about how exciting to watch it was.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the storyline got even worse.

On the next week's *Raw*—the night of the 21st—Triple-H said that he planned to show a videotape that caught Kane in the act. That didn't happen. Instead, WWE fans had to suffer through watching Triple-H don a Kane mask and perform what can be best described as one of the most vulgar moments in television history.

Triple-H, dressed as Kane, entered a funeral parlor and approached Vick, who was laying "dead" in a casket (quite obviously, the body was actually a mannequin), and started yelling at her. Then he grabbed the mannequin, undressed it, and got on top of it. After a short camera pan away, the camera returned to Helmsley as he wiped away a large pile of goo (supposedly her brains) from the mannequin's head, slung it at the camera, and uttered a line I'd just as soon not repeat.

Right about then is when I turned off *Raw*. I blankly stared at *Monday Night Football* while wondering how I could be part of an industry that would feature such a despicable, grotesque, and completely tasteless scene. I was disgusted with myself and with WWE. The company crossed a line, and I wasn't the least bit happy about it.

Eventually, my disgust turned to anger. That anger only intensified on October 28, when Triple-H said live on *Raw* that he didn't give a damn if anyone found the storyline offensive.

WWE hasn't been your parents' wrestling for quite some time. It's had its share of scandalous moments over the past couple of years, and it's been the target of advocacy groups such as the Parents Television Council. We all watched as **Mae Young** gave birth to a hand, **Mark Henry** hooked up with a transvestite, and **The Big Show** surfed

With Scott Steiner added to the WWE roster, perhaps the company will get back to focusing more on what goes on in the ring, not in funeral parlors. "Big Poppa Pump" is controversial, but he can be controversial in a fascinating way.

on his "father's" casket as **Big Bossman** towed it around a graveyard a few years back.

Yes, for one reason or another, all those storylines were inherently wrong, but they weren't so bad that they disgusted you or made you rush to change the channel. They pushed the envelope of good taste, but they were all tinged with just enough humor to take the edge off. They weren't cringe TV.

Cringe TV. That seems to be what WWE—and *Raw* in particular—is going for these days. We watched as **Eric Bischoff** introduced the world to HLA. We witnessed **Rosie** and **Jamal** destroy two defenseless (and barely dressed) women. We suffered through **The Un-Americans** taking pot shots at the United States by making not-so-subtle references to September 11 and the Washington, D.C.-area sniper.

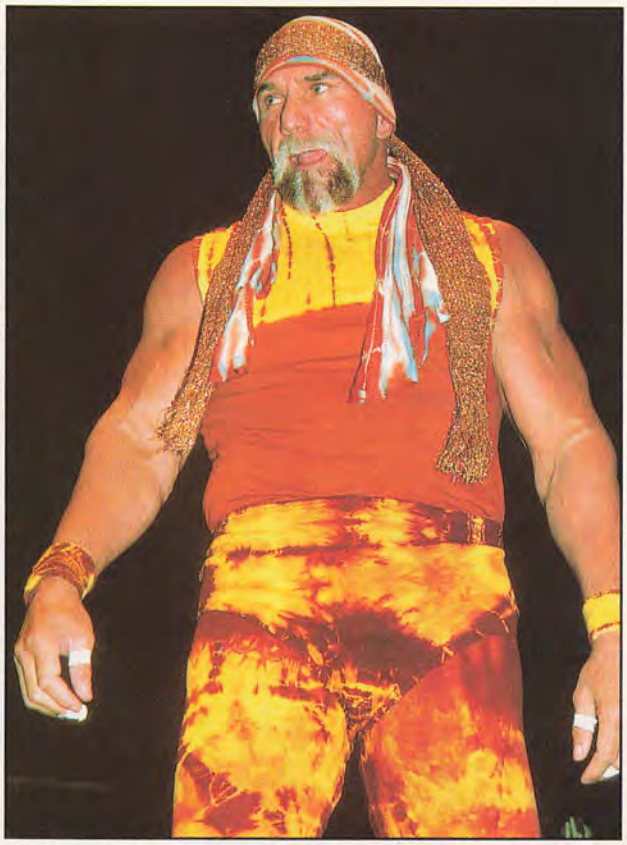
If you remember, WCW once resorted to cringe TV. WCW didn't call it cringe TV, though. It had a different name. **Vince Russo** called his concept Crash TV, and not long after that concept made its debut on WCW TV, the promotion sunk like a scuttled ship. Crash TV was an abysmal failure.

Don't get me wrong. WWE is far from WCW territory. Cringe TV won't turn out to be the silver bullet that killed WWE. It's certainly not helping matters, though. Wrestling fans want wrestling. That's why they're called wrestling fans. Maybe it's time that all those Hollywood types writing *Raw* realize that. Or maybe the fact that the rating for *Raw* dropped from 3.7 on the night of the funeral home segment to 3.4 the following week will help them realize that.

One of the good news items to come out of WWE's struggles was this fall's signing of former WCW World champion **Scott Steiner**. Reports had been surfacing for months that Steiner and WWE were in talks, but **Jim Ross**, WWE senior vice president of talent relations, always downplayed those rumors, basically calling them malarkey.

Whether they were malarkey or not, Steiner is now a WWE wrestler, and his addition to WWE's roster is a solid move. Along with **Bill Goldberg**, Steiner was one of the only superstar free agents on the market, and he'll add a lot of credibility to a promotion that really needs some right now. Other wrestlers step through the ropes and do their best to put on a show. Steiner is a show all unto himself. His "Big Poppa Pump" character is the most believable character to come along in years, and I, for one, am extremely happy that he's back on the national scene. He did a lot as WCW champion. Here's hoping that he gets a chance to revitalize the Raw championship.

In even more good news to report, I'm happy to say that former WWWF World heavyweight champion **"Superstar" Billy Graham**, who has been plagued with serious liver



Good news for long-time wrestling fans who were wondering how Superstar Graham was doing in his quest to find a new liver. He underwent a transplant this fall and seems to be doing well.

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problems the past couple of years, underwent a successful liver transplant in October. As those of you who read **Harry Burkett's** "Win, Lose, Or Draw" column in the August 2002 issue of *PWI* might remember, Graham has been suffering from hepatitis C and cirrhosis of the liver. Doctors had given him less than five years to live without the operation.

Now for a story that seemed totally made up when I first heard about it. WWE has apparently had talks with heavyweight boxing champion **Lennox Lewis** about a possible match with Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar**, possibly at next year's No Way Out pay-per-view in February.

Whether or not this match actually happens, it certainly does make for interesting water cooler conversation. What would the rules be? Would it be a boxing match, a wrestling match, or some kind of boxing/wrestling hybrid? Would Lesnar, a former NCAA heavyweight wrestling champion, be able to handle Lewis' devastating punches? Would Lewis be able to out-quick and out-tough Lesnar if the match wound up on the mat? And would the mainstream press, which WWE would depend heavily upon for free publicity, treat the match like a joke or the real deal?

In the end, the above questions are probably pointless. Odds are that the match *won't* happen. In fact, if Lewis does step inside a WWE ring, it'll probably be because he's wearing a special referee's uniform.

Now, before finishing this month's column, let me offer many thanks to everyone at *PWI* for making "Ringside" excruciatingly difficult to write. "The Business Page" continues to steal all of my business news. I'm confident that "The International Report" will do a fine job of analyzing the goings on in Japan, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and everywhere else men ad women wrestle each other in tights. And the "Independent Roundup" is the independent circuit's new home. I guess this means that "Ringside" is kind of like *PWI's* version of Notre Dame football—the last of the true independents.

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. □

The story about Vince McMahon negotiating with heavyweight boxing champ Lennox Lewis regarding a possible fight or match with Brock Lesnar is not a joke. But it's looking more likely that Lewis will appear in a WWE ring as a guest referee.

HOTLINE

Hosted by Will Welsh

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in focus

By Dave Lenker

MY WWE

As the complaints keep pouring in over the storyline that made most of us long for the days when the most offensive segments on *Raw* involved nothing more than a little innocent HLA, I've decided not to complain about all that ails WWE today. At least not directly. Instead, I present to you an image of what my WWE would look like. (You might find complaints hidden on these pages if you read carefully enough.)

Dave Lenker's WWE would use more people like Nidia. Just like Paul Heyman is the closest thing WWE has to an old school manager, Nidia is the closest thing WWE has to a traditional valet. And such characters would not wrestle regularly (in Dave Lenker's WWE).

•My WWE would include more logical approaches to the big title matches, especially on the Smackdown side. Edge, Eddie Guerrero, Kurt Angle, and Chris Benoit have been treating us to some of the finest matches we've seen in WWE in the last five years—and they do it on a weekly basis. Guerrero was so good in a recent ladder match with Edge that he got a standing ovation as he left the ring and heard chants of "Ed-die! Ed-die!" even though he was the heel and lost the match! So who gets the big title match against Brock Lesnar after Lesnar beats The Undertaker in a bloodbath at No Mercy? The recently acquired Big Show, who has treated us to some of the most forgettable WWE matches not involving Jackie Gayda in the last two years.

The Kane character would not have turned into such a mess in Dave Lenker's WWE. *Hmmmmmm,* if Paul Bearer had Kane locked up all those years, he was disfigured, and he couldn't talk, where does Katie Vick fit in? And wasn't Tori supposedly his first girlfriend?

•My WWE would feature a lot more traditional managers/agents in the mold of Paul Heyman and a lot more traditional valets/cheerleaders/marketing people in the mold of Nidia. And these managers/valets would wrestle two or three times per year at most (and in Heyman's case, zero times at most).

•My WWE would offer a lot more wrestlers, especially those on the Raw side, a legitimate chance of moving up the card. Right now, it looks to me a weekly game of rotate the mid-carders. Let's see, Lance Storm wrestled Buh Buh Ray Dudley this week, so we'll move him to Tommy Dreamer next week, and we'll give Jeff Hardy to Christopher Nowinski, and then move Nowinski to Buh Buh next week, and have Hardy wrestle William Regal while Storm gets Al Snow.

•My WWE would never offer Smackdown or Raw title defenses on free TV. Suddenly, title matches on house shows and pay-per-views and would seem a bit more special.

•My WWE would have a lot more feuds that lasted a lot longer. No more bad guy does something bad this week, good guy gets revenge next week, bad guy comes up with sneaky trick to go one up on good guy the following week, let's settle this at the next PPV, and move on.

•My WWE would not allow any of the wrestlers to date the head of the creative team or Vince McMahon's daughter, or both if they were one and the same.

•My WWE would have our very own Frank Krewda as the head matchmaker for the women's division (with Dan Murphy offering input on every match involving Victoria).

•My WWE would never produce shocking TV just for the sake of producing shocking TV.

•My WWE would redefine the meaning of the recently coined term "three-minute warning." In my WWE, any wrestler who stood inside the ring and delivered a promo that lasted more than three minutes would be subjected to a Rosie and Jamal beatdown.

•My WWE would not add any more pay-per-views to the schedule, but it would feature Raw- and Smackdown-only PPVs on alternate months, with the exception of blockbuster combined shows for WrestleMania and SummerSlam. Of course, that would require my WWE to build a stronger Raw roster. That would be challenging, even for my WWE.

•My WWE would have signed Scott Steiner and Bill Goldberg at least a year ago.

•My WWE would force its creative teams to always have at least the next two weeks of TV completely booked at any given time. *At least.*

•My WWE would hire an intern whose sole job would be to chronicle the various life *stories* of Kane as they have been presented to us over the last five years. That intern would then present his or her findings to all members of the creative team (possibly including Vince McMahon) with the intent of embarrassing them with all the inconsistencies. Said creative team members would then be so embarrassed that they would not make such brain-numbing mistakes again, because wrestling fans *do* notice these things. At least they wouldn't make such mistakes in *my* WWE.

•My WWE would not refer to the major singles title defended on Raw brand shows as the World title and the major singles title defended on Smackdown brand shows as the WWE title. My WWE would follow my *PWI's* lead and refer to them as the Raw and Smackdown titles to avoid confusion.

•My WWE would give one of it secondary shows *(Heat* or *Velocity)* to Jim Cornette and the OVW crew. Why not give fans a chance to see guys with legitimate chances to be the superstars of tomorrow in compelling storylines? It'd be more interesting than watching meaningless matches with WWE also-rans for whom the company can't find a role.

•My WWE would produce video vignettes for every soon-to-be-arriving new superstar and every superstar returning from a major injury. Look at the anticipation the company built up for the debuts of Rey Misterio Jr., Scott Steiner, and even Batista on the Raw side. Let's hope we see the same treatment for the comebacks of Rhyno and Lita and the arrivals of the next wave of talent *(see page 32)* from OVW. Big returns and debuts should always be treated as very special events. This is all part of strong *long-term* booking. And my WWE would *always* be concerned with that.

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at PWIFocus@aol.com.)* □

Rhyno has a chance to be something special when he comes back from his neck injury. His return would be treated as something special in Dave Lenker's WWE. Let's hope it will be in the real WWE as well.

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

THERE ARE A bunch of stiffs in my office who didn't dig the whole Triple-H-Katie Vick-Kane casket video. While I found it disturbing on some level, I couldn't help but chuckle as I watched it. Sure, it was lower on the sleaze scale than Bossman dragging The Big Show's dad's casket around behind a truck, or Al Snow being fed Pepper steak that was made with his pet, but it's the same tasteless humor nonetheless. Best of all, no mannequins were harmed in the making of the video. The only thing harmed was the already abused psyche of the typical wrestling fan. I just hope the only thing WWE lost was the little shred of dignity that it still retained, and not its fan base.

Just how low can the Ent go before it turns the fans away in droves? I'm afraid that we're about to find out. But, as you all wander aimlessly in search of a new, exciting product to occupy your dateless nights, you can look toward me as your guiding light. Dear cretins, follow me and I will lead you to the promised land of good wrestling and understandable angles. Of course, I'll just be handing you tapes labeled "The Best Of Gino Hernandez, Volumes I, II, And III," but you'll understand once you start watching his matches. Remember, he's your real champion.

Brandi,

I hate to sound like a purist, but I think it's a disgrace that Triple-H was "awarded" the WCW World championship belt. It's everything a championship belt should be: big and gaudy, but with true meaning and lineage. The WWF belt doesn't have that, as it has changed over the years, and "Stone-Cold" thought so much of it that he made his own version. Ric Flair, Booker T, and even Sting have to be sick to their stomachs. (part 1)

[pause]

(part 2)

"Easy E" should have more of a sense of history than that. Note to the WWF decision-makers: Guys, if you really want a Raw belt, design one from scratch and stop disrespecting the greatest and most historical belt in wrestling today.

MADGUNS MONSTER
$MONEY ENTERTAINMENT$
4686593@skytel.com

DEAR MADGUNS,

I hate to sound like a sadist, but Triple-H deserves to have a belt just handed to him. He's just that damn good. Just kidding. Actually, being awarded the belt did Raw a favor. Trips didn't have to destroy one or more of the top Raw wrestlers on his way to taking the belt. This way, the Raw roster's top guys don't look as weak as they would if Trips had mauled them in the ring. We all know that he'd beat the hell out of them all. Now, how can any brainless putz, *er*, fan care about say Booker T if he's already had his ass handed to him by Triple-H? It just makes Booker's matches look all the more pointless.

(part 1)

[pause]

(part 2)

As far as history goes, it doesn't matter anymore. If the masses really cared about WCW, it would still be in

You idiots should thank Eric Bischoff for handing the Raw title over to Triple-H. It saved the Raw roster the embarrassment of getting beaten by Trips on his way to the title, anyway.

operation today. Same goes for ECW. For the love of Jim Crockett, give it up.

Hello Brandi,

I am a new reader of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED magazine. I must admit that I enjoyed reading it, but I have one legitimate question to ask you. What has happened to wrestling?

I have enjoyed wrestling since I was a young kid, but wrestling has lost its luster. Wrestlers no longer wrestle for entertainment purposes. They wrestle for the pure financial gain. And because of this mental shift, it is damaging the sport that I once loved. What is going on with this newly found wrestling federation, NWA-TNA? If you ask me, it is just an organization filled with a bunch of "has-been" wrestlers. Don't they know that they are simply making a mockery out of the sport? Some of those wrestlers can hardly perform at the professional level anymore. Brandi, please help me understand. What happened to Bill Goldberg, Lex Luger, Sting, The Great Muta, Sid Vicious, and Vader? I think wrestling as a whole is going downhill. Wrestlers shouldn't forsake integrity for money.

LESTER GREENE
Elevation23@yahoo.com

Hello Lester,

Since you're a new reader, I'll try to take it easy on you. Think of it as my little gift to you for choosing our fine publication. You claimed to have one legitimate question to ask, yet you posed several questions to me. You're a guy who likes to challenge me. I like that. Well, only the first question was legitimate, so I'll answer that one. In a nutshell, wrestling has changed with society and your advancing age. As a child, you were too taken in by the personalities of the wrestlers to notice that they were haggling over every last dime of their paydays. Your childhood version of money problems was how you were going to get your piggy bank open to buy gum. On the way to adulthood, you became more aware of money and responsibility. In wrestling, a little thing called kayfabe was broken down, giving more insight to the inner dealings of contract negotiations and the like. So, with your heightened awareness of money matters, combined with the flood of backstage bad laundry being aired in public, the entertainment value of what is being displayed each week has been lost. Don't worry, though, this trend of disillusionment is apparent in other sports as well, like baseball. America's favorite pastime is on the verge of collapsing.

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

i'm one of the jerichoholics that stayed with him when he turned heel at the survivor series when he nailed the rock down near the end of the match and the next night following the raw after survivor series when he took out kane and the rock.he is one of the greatest wrestlers he goes down as my secound favorite wrestler of all time first favorite bret hart.jericho should be in main event status going for the raw world title because he is the first undisputed heavyweight champion of the world.he held the title for 4 months defeating every person who he step into the ring and he is the only wrestler who defeated the rock and steve austin in one night lest than 45 minutes.he is the first canadian to win the title since 1997 and ric flair the last time he had his 16th title raigne was handed the title by kevin nash.also he is a 4 time intercontinental champion longest time holding the title in 2001 from the rumble to smackdown in april.jericho is a former 5 time cruiserweight champion and telivison champion also wcw champion which he one in the wwe but he has never had a shot in his 4 years in wcw.also former ecw champ.former wwe europeon champion hardcore champ and current 2 time world tag team champ.so flair never held not much titles than jericho plus jericho been in hell in a cell not flair jericho beet austin and triple h after judgentday 2001 on raw.so chris jericho does not need to learn 5 lessons from flair any way.

ROY SUTHERLAND
Fredericton New Brunswick

The first symptom of Jerichoholism is seen when the infected person starts dressing like a color-blind homeless bum. From there, it progresses to giving the infected person the features of a 1980s fluff-metal, hair band member. After that, we can only hope for death.

Readers,

This is why it isn't good to be a Jerichoholic. The oft-ignored negative effects of worshipping this long-haired freak are great and permanent, possibly even fatal. Once the infatuation with Jericho starts, the infected person's brain cells rapidly mutate and die. Once the brain cells die off, the transformation to full Jerichoholic is complete. At that point, the infected person can no longer function as a fashionably adept member of society. Heck, even the preferred music of a Jerichoholic sucks. My advice to you, newly informed reader, is to take universal precautions when dealing with this deadly infection. While we all think we know the stereotypical "look" of a Jerichoholic, the infection can be harbored in unsuspecting wrestling fans for several months before it reaches its full potency. □

krew-cuts

By Frank Krewda

O' Canada. WWE writers are an unusual bunch. For years, they have resisted the urge to address topical issues with anything remotely resembling tact—no matter how sensitive the subject matter was.

That's why the recent disbanding of The Un-Americans came as such a huge shock to me. For reason or reasons that haven't been made completely clear, the creative team apparently caved in to that overwhelming sensation the rest of us call common sense.

I suppose Vinnie Mac deserves credit for pulling the plug on this program before the mainstream media watchdogs barked too loudly at WWE for cashing in on the repugnant stench of anti-Americanism wafting around the globe (and the halls of Congress) these days.

Unfortunately, I suspect this rare display of class will prove to be an isolated incident. You see, now that Lance Storm, Test, Christian, and William Regal are no longer sending the infamous distress signal, the company is saddled with four more mid-carders that few fans seem to care about. And that's not good for business. Or for those wrestlers.

In some ways, WWE was in a no-win position. It finally comes up with a storyline that brings heat on anyone associated with it—but for the wrong reasons—and is forced to abandon a program with legs. Ultimately, Vince stepped up and did the right thing. But I doubt he'd do it twice.

Good news/bad news: Vince McMahon finally scrapped the tasteless Un-Americans idea and the group split up, but now Lance Storm and the other former members of the clique must find a way to get fans to feel strongly about them. That hasn't been easy so far.

THE RETURN OF BIGBADBOOTYLICIOUSFREAKDADDYPUMP. Like most wrestling fans, I considered the addition of Scott Steiner to WWE a good thing (beg your pardon, DDP!) I'm not so sure WWE's front office—or Steiner's new co-workers—will feel the same way, despite what they may be saying publicly. By time you read this, Scott Steiner might or might not still be wrestling in WWE. Whether he is or is not all depends on the answers to these four questions.

Question one: Will Steiner's back and foot hold up? Obviously, Steiner is physically cleared to wrestle. But at his age and with his recent history of injury, Steiner should be used judiciously in the ring. Keep in mind, however, that Jim Ross has already announced that in addition to appearing on TV, he will be expected to be a regular on the house show circuit.

Question two: Will Steiner become a disruptive presence behind the scenes? No. He'll become a disruptive presence behind the scenes, in the ring, and on TV. "Big Poppa Pump's" unpredictability and general disregard for authority will keep performers and executives alike cringing. Then again, that's what makes him so great.

Question three: Can Vince keep Steiner in line? You know how Vince likes to send Bradshaw after upshots who refuse to play ball? Well, that won't work on Steiner. And as we learned when WCW tried to suspend Steiner for deviating from the script and delivering a surprise promo on Ric Flair, Steiner won't keep quiet if he feels wronged.

Question four: Can the WWE locker room accommodate yet another enormous ego? Triple-H, Rock (occasionally), RVD, Un-

Scott Steiner will be a very disruptive force on camera and in the WWE locker room, predicts Frank Krewda. But he doesn't necessarily think that will be such a bad thing.

dertaker, Michaels (occasionally), and now Scott Steiner. Uh, probably not.

So there you have it. If an experiment were ever to blow up in WWE's face, the Scott Steiner experiment is likely to be the one. But I have to admit, watching Steiner tear WWE apart from the inside will be as entertaining as anything WWE's done in a long time. And it might just be what the company needs.

Rock 'n' roll. In a recent column, I divulged my passion for music. I hope my work in this magazine (and other London Publishing offerings) gives readers a sense of how I feel about professional wrestling. I like music. I like professional wrestling. But I don't like music and professional wrestling together.

To borrow a headline from a recent column written by Fox newsman Bill O'Reilly, "I know it's only rock 'n' roll, but it's brutal." O'Reilly was writing about VH1's ill-advised decision to air a documentary about the exploits of prison band Dark Mischief. I'm referring to the growing number of rock bands willing to get involved in professional wrestling.

Why would serious musicians such as Kiss, Megadeth, and Billy Corgan of The Smashing Pumpkins ever lend their talent or their faces to pro wrestling organizations? The level of risk seems mighty disproportionate to the potential payoff to me.

While our sport has certainly gained modest acceptance in the entertainment world, thanks in large part to The Rock's efforts, it certainly lags far behind popular music as a cultural pillar. People with no interest, or perhaps even disdain for wrestling, willingly look to Corgan's sensitive lyrics for relief, joy, direction, etc. Getting involved in professional wrestling—in their eyes, at least—dilutes his body of work and compromises his legitimacy as an artist.

From a fan's perspective, however, I can understand how hard-driving music contributes to the electric atmosphere of a live event during the ring intros. Bands such as Drowning Pool, Fozzy, and Saliva are not among my favorites, but they do fit the bill.

The live performances, on the other hand, do not. Like most wrestling fans, I watch *Raw, Smackdown,* and pay-per-view events for the wrestling, not the music. That's what VH1 is for.

Besides, the music is invariably poor, and the performances too long. Plus, I could also get by without Jerry Lawler hawking the latest in WWE sounds. Dollars to doughnuts, he hasn't listened to an entire WWE CD yet.

It's only through attrition that I've accepted this cultural mandate that says wrestling clips and commercials must be serenaded by ear-splitting vocals and crunching guitars. It's just that the mute button on my remote is now worn down to the nub, for crying out loud.

Buzz cuts. Does anyone else find it ironic that Regal, one of WWE's most thoroughly trained wrestlers, must rely on a brass knuckle sandwich as his finisher? ... I admire the female form as much as anyone, but the size of Jacquelyn's bust is bordering on the absurd. If she feels inflating her chest is the only way to keep pace with crackerjack matsmiths like Jackie Gayda and Stacy Keibler, I suggest she get back in the gym and rediscover some of the ability that made her one of the best female wrestlers in the world a few years ago. □

Enough with the rock bands on wrestling shows! Krewda can understand why Fozzy, Chris Jericho's band, would be featured on *Raw*, but he doesn't see why other bands with no clear connection to the sport would want to get involved.

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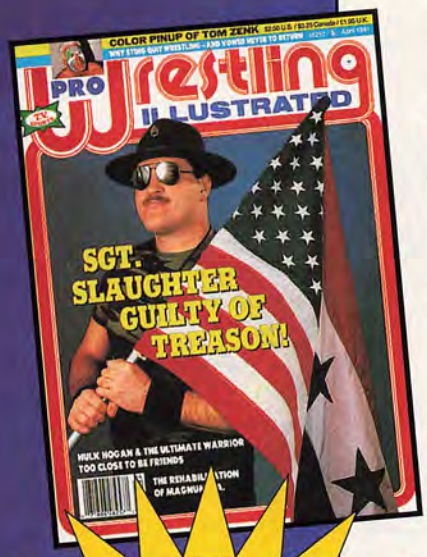

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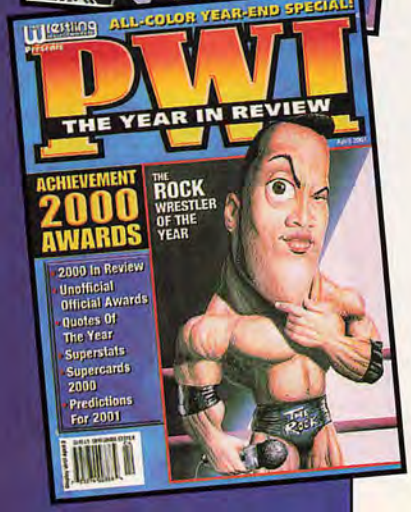

April 1985: Jimmy Snuka: "I Want Piper!"—Even If It Kills The Tonga Kid. Centerfold: Ronnie Garvin. Plus: Flair-Rhodes, Terry Gordy, Jim Garvin, Road Warriors.

June 1985: Super Dream Contest: Play Dusty Rhodes' Trivia Game And Win His Boots! Centerfold: Barry Windham. Plus: Flair-Kerry, Fabulous Ones-Road Warriors, Hogan-Volkoff, Magnum T.A.

January 1990: Warrior's Next Victim: Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Ross, Midnight Express.

May 1990: Hulk Hogan: Primed And Ready For WrestleMania VI. Centerfold: Great Muta. Plus: Piper-Rude, Eric Embry, Rock 'n' Rolls, Sid Vicious, pain.

July 1990: The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The "Total Package" Becomes The People's Choice. Centerfold: Rick Martel. Plus: Skyscrapers, Bobby Heenan, Mr. Saito, referees.

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

October 1990: Sting's Painful Lesson: You'll Have No Friends At The Top. Centerfold: Brutus Beefcake. Plus: Orndorff-Blanchard, Tugboat, Teddy Long, Ultimate Warrior, Road Warriors.

February 1991: WrestleMania VII Contest. Centerfold: 1991 calendar. Plus: Sid Vicious, DiBiase-Rhodes, Scott Steiner, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

April 1991: Sgt. Slaughter Guilty Of Treason! Centerfold: Tom Zenk. Plus: Sting, Magnum T.A., Jesse Ventura, Lawler-Gilbert, Hogan & Warrior.

June 1991: Hulk Hogan: America's Hero. Centerfold: Hacksaw Duggan. Plus: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Nasty Boys, Steiners, Simmons-Reed.

July 1991: The War Is Over! Hulk Hogan Liberates The WWF Belt From Sgt. Slaughter! Centerfold: Brian Pillman. Plus: Horsemen, Lex Luger, Eric Embry, Demolition.

August 1991 (Special Issue): Supercards '91. Centerfold: Hulk Hogan. Plus: WrestleMania VII, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior, Owen Hart, Koloff-Luger.

October 1991: Sid Justice: The Second Coming Of Hulk Hogan. Centerfold: Lex Luger. Plus: Hogan-Slaughter, Terrence Taylor, Barry Windham, Williams-Bigelow.

November 1991: Your Wedding Gift For Savage & Elizabeth: Help Lift The "Macho Man's" Suspension! Centerfold: Bobby Eaton. Plus: Tito Santana, Bushwhackers, Jushin Liger, Brian Pillman.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

July 1992: The Best Of The Best—The Masters Of Their Craft. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Liger-Pillman, Jim Neidhart, U.S.-Japan, Ric Flair.

September 1992: Savage vs. Sting: Why It Isn't That Unlikely. Centerfold: Nikita Koloff. Plus: Steiners, Barry Windham, Sid Justice, Hodge & Weston, Shawn Michaels.

October 1992: The Hatred Still Runs Deep: Ultimate Warrior vs. Randy Savage—They'll Settle Up At SummerSlam! Centerfold: Cactus Jack. Plus: Steve Williams, Tom Zenk, WWF title controversy, fire match, Eric Embry.

February 1993: No One Can Cut Down Razor Ramon. Centerfold: Curt Hennig. Plus: Jake Roberts, Pillman-Dustin, Ric Flair-Road Warriors, Rick Rude, Snuka-Muraco.

May 1993: WrestleMania Without Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: The Undertaker. Plus: Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Madusa-Sherri, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior.

April 1996: WCW World Title Turmoil. Centerfold: The Kid. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Ahmed Johnson, Bob Armstrong, Michaels-Bret, Public Enemy.

May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

August 1996: Shawn Michaels: Finally—A World Champion. Centerfold: Sunny. Plus: 1-2-3 Kid, Sting-Flair, Sandman-Missy, Steve Austin, Jimmy Hart, WrestleMania XII.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

Winter 1996 (Special Issue): *PWI* 500. Centerfold: Shawn Michaels.

February 1997: Mr. Perfect: "Shawn Michaels Stole My Life." Centerfold: "Psycho" Sid. Plus: Kroffat & Furnas, Vince McMahon, Randy Savage, New Razor & New Diesel.

July 1997: Steve Austin: Stone-Cold And Uncensored! Centerfold: "Diamond" Dallas Page. Plus: Rocky Maivia, The Road Warriors, The Eliminators, Nick Patrick.

December 1997: Ken Shamrock's Deadly Climb To The Top. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Eddy Guerrero, Perry Saturn, WWF light heavyweights.

Holiday 1997: *PWI* 500. Centerfold: Dean Malenko.

February 1998: Sting vs. Hogan—The Match Of The Century! Centerfold: Hogan vs. Sting fight poster. Plus: 16-page Starrcade preview, Perry Saturn, Dude Love.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It ... But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

June 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 PWI Poll. Centerfold: Steve Austin. Plus: Sabu, Lex Luger, Sting, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg.

July 1998: WWF vs. WCW: Which Is Better? Centerfold: Rocky Maivia. Plus: Benoit, Bill Goldberg, Ahmed Johnson.

October 1998: Bret Screws Bret, Part II. Centerfold: Hunter Hearst Helmsley. Plus: Jim Ross, Marcus Bagwell, WWF controversy, FBI.

November 1998: Vince Mc(Mad)Man! He Crossed The Bottom Line ... Now He'll Pay! Centerfold:

Kevin Nash. Plus: Sting, Bret Hart, Taz-Douglas, New Age Outlaws.

December 1998: Gold Rush! Get Ready For The Most Awesome WCW Title Reign Ever! Centerfold: Undertaker. Plus: The Giant, Vader, Guerreros, Ken Shamrock.

Holiday 1998 (100-Page Special Issue): *PWI* 500. Eighth Annual Special.

March 1999 (100-Page Special Issue): 1998—The Year In Wrestling. 1998 In Review, Achievement '98 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, Predictions for 1999.

April 1999: The Crock! The Title Change That Screwed The World! Centerfold: Chris Jericho. Plus: Bill Goldberg, Tommy Dreamer, Booker T, more Unofficial/ Officials.

May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

June 1999: (100-Page Special Issue): The 1999 *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.

July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.

August 1999: (100-Page Special Issue): Supercards '99: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Super 8, Bam Bam Bigelow, Jerry Lawler, tag team wrestling.

September 1999: Why Stone-Cold Might Get Out While He's Still On Top! Centerfold: Sting. Plus: Kidman & Misterio, The Rock, Bret Hart, Taz-Sabu.

October 1999: Why The World Must Fear Scott Steiner, By Buff Bagwell. Centerfold: Mankind. Plus: Kane & X-Pac, The Godfather, Perry Saturn, 20th anniversary readers' poll.

November 1999: The Women Of The WWF: There's More To Their Power Than Their Looks. Centerfold: Owen Hart. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr., Roddy Piper, Steiners, Steve Austin.

December 1999: Steve Austin: "CEO This! I'm The Damn Champ!" Centerfold: Rey Misterio Jr. Plus: Randy Savage, Jimmy Hart, WCW youth, Billy Gunn.

Holiday 1999 (100-Page Special Issue): *PWI* 500. Ninth Annual Special.

January 2000: The Millennium Man Mouths Off! An Unforgettable Hour With Chris Jericho! Centerfold: Taz. Plus: Chris Benoit, Sid-Goldberg, Triple-H.

February 2000: The Master Manipulator! How Stone-Cold Controls The WWF. Centerfold: Kane. Plus: Paul Heyman, Hogan-Bret-Sting-Luger.

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April 2000: Stone-Cold vs. The Rock: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania! Centerfold: Chris Benoit. Plus: Dallas Page, Goldberg-Vicious, more Unofficial awards.

May 2000 (100-Page Special Issue): The Y2K *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mitsuharu Misawa, Triple-H, Bret Hart, Hollys, Chyna & Aysa, ECW returnees.

June 2000: Just Wondering, Steph ... Is Triple-H Worth Your Billion-Dollar Inheritance? Centerfold: The Rock. Plus: Heyman-Van Dam, Vader, NWO.

July 2000: Call It A Wrap, Jack! You've Done Your Share ... Go Home! Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Dusty Rhodes, Disco Inferno, DDP, Dudleys-Hardys.

August 2000 (100-Page Special Issue): Supercards 2000: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Rob Van Dam, greatest supercards, Super 8.

September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.

October 2000: Scott Steiner: The Superstar The WWF Let Slip Away. Centerfold: Rikishi. Plus: Shawn Michaels, Austin-Rock, Rhino-RVD.

November 2000: The Rock vs. Triple-H. Our Special 50-Category Analysis. Pinups: Extreme wrestling. Plus: Nash-Steiner-Hall, Hardcore Holly, wrestling too extreme?

December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.

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Holiday 2000 (116-Page Special): *PWI* 500. Includes: The editors' views, a look back at 1991's top 25, Achievement 2000 ballot.

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May 2001: The WrestleMania Curse! Will The Great One Ever Win The Big One? Plus: Vince McMahon, William Regal, Page & Nash, Ivory, Lance Storm, ECW.

June 2001 (116-Page Special): The 2001 *PWI* Poll. Plus: Ric Flair, Chyna, Steve Austin.

July 2001: Women's Work! It Ain't What It Used To Be! Plus: Dudleys, Chavo Guerrero Jr., Justin Credible, Francine, Scott Steiner.

August 2001 (116-Page Special): Supercards 2001: WrestleMania X-Seven, WCW Night of Champions, Super 8. Plus: Big Show, Kane, Jeff Jarrett, Tommy Dreamer.

September 2001: WWF-WCW: The 10 Questions That Must Be Answered. Plus: Triple-H, Stacy Keibler, Paul Heyman, Matt Hardy.

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November 2001: A Crying Shane: He Paid The Price To Purchase WCW ... Is He Willing To Pay The Price To Keep It? Plus: DDP-Kimberly, Edge, Molly-Spike, Tajiri, Rob Van Dam, Mick Foley, Florida indies.

December 2001 (116-Page Special): *PWI* 500—Angle Climbs To The Top. Includes: The editors' views, Achievement 2001 ballot.

January 2002: There's Something About Lita—What Makes Her The WWF's "It" Girl. Plus: Jericho-Stephanie, Mark Henry, X-Pac, Triple-H, Undertaker.

February 2002 (116-Page Special): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of the WWF, independents, international, the business, the art. Plus: Goldberg.

March 2002: No More Joking, No More Choking: Y2J Takes A Serious Stab At Superstardom! Plus: Test, The Rock, Eric Bischoff, Bradshaw, Foley vs. Regal.

April 2002 (116-Page Special): 2001—The Year In Wrestling. 2001 In Review, Achievement 2001 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, Predictions for 2002.

May 2002: The Mania To End All Manias! What Will Wrestling Look Like By WrestleMania X-9? Plus: Trish Stratus, RVD, Russ Haas, Big Bossman, WWF comedy.

June 2002 (116-Page Special): The 2002 *PWI* Poll. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Steve Austin.

July 2002: Steph Infection! How Can Triple-H Keep His Mind On His Game? Plus: Goldust-Terri, NWO, Ron Waterman, Spike & Tazz, Jazz.

August 2002 (116-Page Special): Supercards 2002: WrestleManiaX8, WWA Revolution, Super 8. Plus: X-Pac, Steve Corino, Ric Flair.

September 2002: No Rock ... No Problem: The WWF Can Thrive Without The Great One. Plus: WWF draft, Billy Kidman, Sean O'Haire, Stanley Weston.

October 2002 (116-Page Special): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Lou Thesz, Francine, Edge.

November 2002: Stone-Cold Meltdown! Plus: Heyman & Lesnar, Lance Storm, NWA: TNA, DDP, A.J. Styles, Island Boys.

December 2002: (116-Page Special): *PWI* 500—RVD Is No. 1. Includes: The editors' views, Achievement 2002 ballot.

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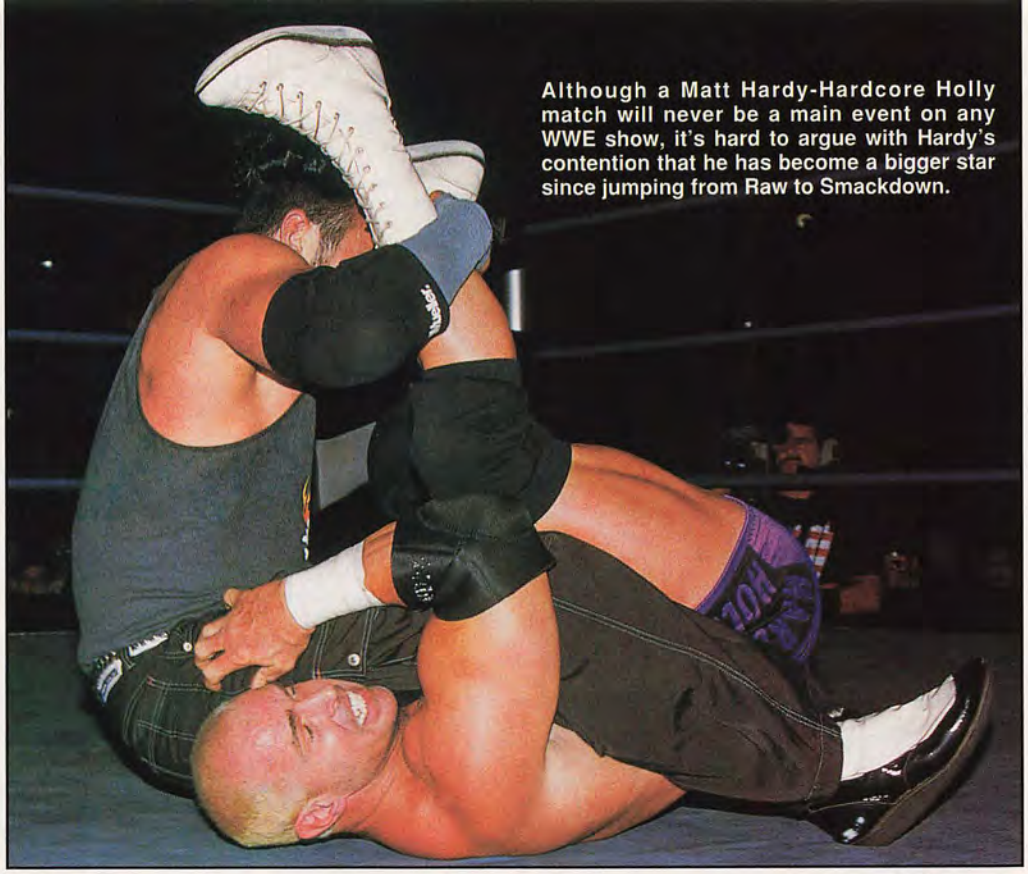
press conference...



Although a Matt Hardy-Hardcore Holly match will never be a main event on any WWE show, it's hard to argue with Hardy's contention that he has become a bigger star since jumping from Raw to Smackdown.

MATT HARDY

MATT HARDY HAS a Napoleon complex times two. Not only is he relatively small (6'1", 213) by WWE standards, he's also been featured as "that other Hardy boy" for the majority of his WWE career. Despite being one-half of a team that captured five WWE World tag team titles, Matt was always looked upon as Jeff's brother, the Hardy boy who was solid but not terribly flashy in the ring. In fact, some people used to think Matt wouldn't have made it to WWE if he hadn't had Jeff's coattails to coast in on. That's a pretty tough nugget for any working man to swallow, but it's even harder for a professional wrestler to bear such a stigma. Nobody wants to be perceived as a hanger-on.

That's why it's all about "Mattitude" these days. Hardy was forced to be humble for far too long, and he simply couldn't take it anymore. After jumping from Raw to Smackdown a few months ago—a move that forced both him and his brother to try their hands at singles competition—Matt has found his stride. He's competing against some of the brand's top stars while building a reputation as one of WWE's most well-rounded competitors.

Of course, he's also developed a reputation for being an egotistical maniac—and the reputation is deserved.

Upon arriving at Smackdown, Hardy started walking taller (perhaps too tall) and speaking louder (perhaps too loud). He began making boasts that he couldn't back up and taking credit for things that he didn't contribute to. At first, friends such as Shannon Moore and The Hurricane were happy to see him, but even they eventually soured on their former amigo. Then came an odd feud with The Undertaker and a tenuous alliance with Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar. All that scenario did was keep Matt unbooked for two straight pay-per-views. When it was all over, he was no closer to the main event. In fact, because of some lopsided losses to Undertaker, he might have been even farther away.

***PWI** wanted to talk with Hardy about his recent tribulations, so Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker, Senior Writer Will Welsh, and Contributing Writer Matt Brock met with Hardy to discuss his jump to Smackdown, his new outlook on life, and why in the heck he got himself involved in the Lesnar-Undertaker feud.*

DAVE LENKER: Okay, Matt, what's going on? The last time we spoke, you were pretty humble. Now you act like the world should be groveling at your feet. What happened?

MATT HARDY: I resent that statement. Do you know to whom you're talking? I'm Matt Hardy, baby. In case you haven't noticed, I'm one of the hottest wrestlers on the Smackdown roster. You had better start treating me with some respect. If you don't start behaving yourself, I'm apt to just up and leave.

MATT BROCK: Feel free, Matt. Go ahead and leave. I just saw Eddie Guerrero walk around the corner. We'll interview him, okay? If you don't want to be here, leave. You're not doing us any favors.

"BASICALLY, I WAS IN THE RING WITH LESNAR AND THE UNDERTAKER BECAUSE SMACKDOWN NEEDED ME IN THE RING WITH THOSE GUYS. THEY WERE MAKING THE MAIN EVENTS A LITTLE DULL AND PREDICTABLE. A LITTLE 'MATTITUDE' CHANGED ALL THAT COMPLETELY."

HARDY: Listen, you want me, so you got me. All I'm asking for is a little respect. Show me some, and I'll show you losers some.

WILL WELSH: Okay, Matt, this summer, you turned against Jeff while he was wrestling RVD. Then you jumped to Smackdown before he had a chance to confront you. Now, I'm going to assume that you were already under contract to Smackdown when you attacked your brother that night. If that was the case, why'd you have to go to the ring and cost him his match against RVD?

HARDY: You're not remembering the whole picture. Earlier that night, Jeff did what he always does: He upstaged me. I was supposed to be in the main event against Van Dam that night. That was supposed to be my match, but he just up and took it.

WELSH: If I recall, it wasn't Jeff that booted you out of that match. It was Raw GM Eric Bischoff. He tossed a coin, and without even looking at it, he said that it came up for Jeff. All Jeff did was run with the opportunity that was presented to him.

HARDY: Yeah, but a good brother would've stopped and told Bischoff, "Hey, my brother really wants that shot. He asked for it. Why don't you just let him have it?" But Jeff didn't do that, which is why I hit him with the twist of fate during the match.

LENKER: And Bischoff's decision to give Jeff the match instead of you ... is that why you jumped to Smackdown?

HARDY: That certainly was part of it. Bischoff doesn't know true talent when he sees it. I mean, how could he have possibly been in favor of Jeff and not me? He should've known that I'm the star of the show. Stephanie McMahon knows that. It's why she hired me.

BROCK: Stephanie hired you because you're the star of the show? That's a crock, and you know it. I have sources on the inside who tell me that McMahon got you on the cheap, that you came to her looking to jump ship and she gave you a lowball offer that you accepted.

HARDY: Talk about a crock! That's pure lies! Who's feeding you this information, old man? Where are you getting this, from an online newsboard or something? Steph took care of me when she signed me. I dare you to prove that she didn't!

LENKER: *(Turning to Brock)* Matt, can you prove that what you said is correct? Can you say who gave you that information?

BROCK: Sure I can, Dave. Nobody gave me that info. It's

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.

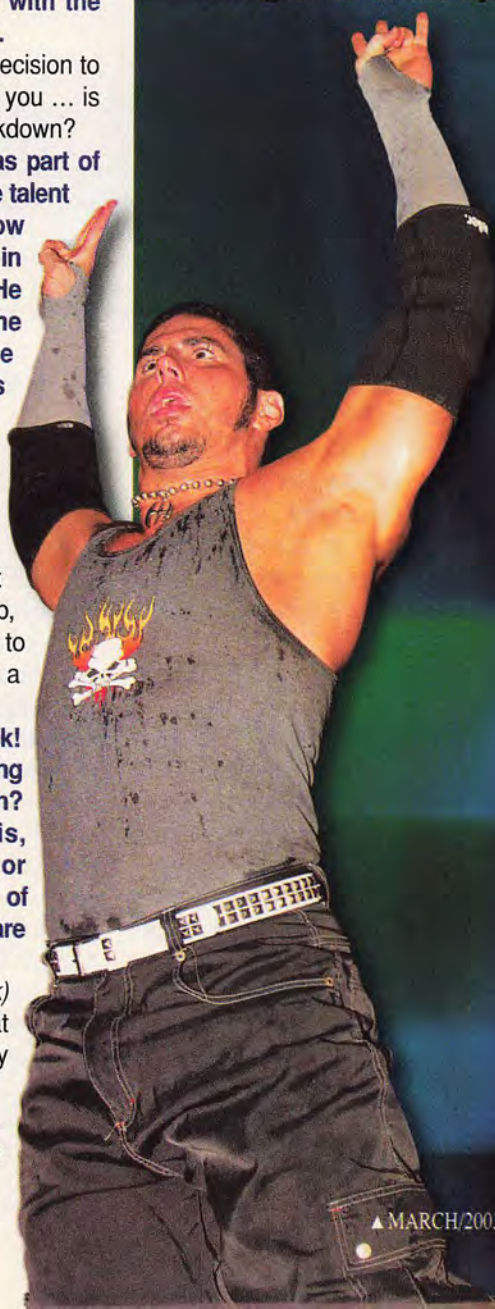


Photo By Claus Andersen

Remember how furious and concerned Hardy used to get when someone on the WWE roster attacked Lita? He must have forgotten about that when he was in the ring against Torrie Wilson in a recent mixed tag.

pure speculation. I only brought it up to see what kind of reaction I'd get. The kid fell for it hook, line, and sinker.

HARDY: You're making things up? What kind of interview is this? You know, I passed up an appearance on a nationally syndicated television show to be with you guys today. This is the thanks I get?

LENKER: I'm sorry. My colleague can get a little inventive at times, and it's not always appropriate. Why don't we move on. Lately, you've been a little more heady, a little more self-assured. I would even call you cocky. How would you describe yourself?

HARDY: I think cocky is appropriate. I'm the best at what I do, Dave. There's nobody that wrestles better than Matt Hardy. I am a complete and total package.

WELSH: Speaking of total packages, Matt, you're starting to remind me of somebody I was happy to forget about, Lex Luger. Luger constantly patted himself on the back, just like you're doing now. Do you see the comparison? Do you have a little narcissist in you?

HARDY: Of course I do. Who doesn't? You have to be a little cocky to make it in this business. And why shouldn't I be a little high on myself? I'm the best Hardy boy in the business, and I've proven that by becoming a bona fide main-event wrestler for Smackdown. I really don't have anything left to prove. If everybody had a "Mattitude" like mine, the world—and WWE—would be a much better place.

BROCK: Get off it, Hardy. You act like you're WWE's savior. What makes you so special?

HARDY: Do I have to say this again? I'm the total package. Girls want me and the guys want to be me. And everyone wants to know what it's like to be Matt Hardy these days.

WELSH: Unfortunately, I think we're finding out what it's like, and it's not a pretty picture.

HARDY: I really don't know what's going on here today. I've always had a great relationship with you people, but today you've turned on me. What's with the Pearl Harbor job?

LENKER: I'm not going to sit here and allow you to attack my staff. We're just doing our jobs. And if we are treating you differently today, maybe it's because we have to. Maybe it's not just us. Maybe it's you, too. Do you think that's a possibility?

HARDY: Hardly. I think you guys are just jealous little reporters. You sit and write about professional wrestling every day, yet you've never gotten into the ring yourselves. And when you're interviewing a guy like me, that jealousy is going to come out a little bit more than it normally would. I'm the one in the ring with The Undertaker. I'm the one in the ring with Brock Lesnar. Not you! Me!

LENKER: You couldn't pay me to get in the ring with those guys, but since you brought the subject up, why don't you explain what's going on with you, 'Taker, and Lesnar. If you ask us, it seems like you're trying a bit too hard to introduce yourself into the main-event mix.

HARDY: Again with the criticism. What do I have to do to get you guys to say something nice about me today? Honestly, a guy makes good and gets into the main-event picture, and all you dopes can do is rain on his parade.

LENKER: It's a legitimate question. Most of the success you had against 'Taker came because Lesnar interfered on your behalf. As for Lesnar, he seemed like he put up with you solely because you were helping him out by interfering with Undertaker during their matches. To me, it looked like you were a third wheel on a bicycle.

Photos By Claus Andersen

Hardy was totally convinced that Torrie was interested in him when she lined him up for what would have been an interesting stinkface (above left). He never saw the ol' last-minute switcharoo with Rikishi coming (above right).

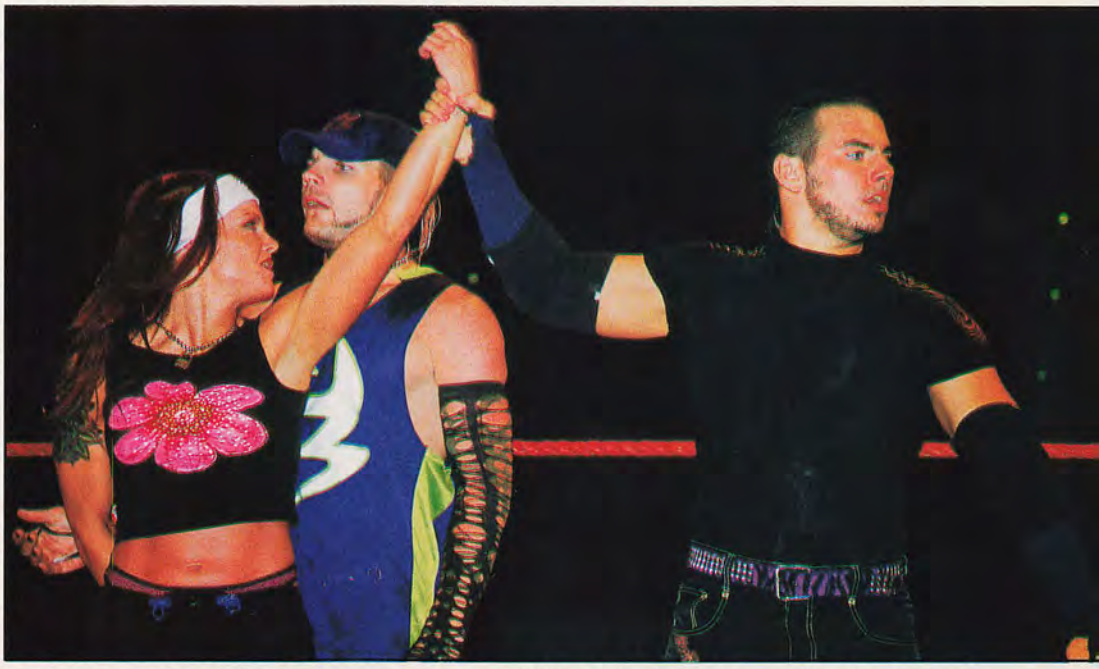
HARDY: I was in the ring with The Undertaker because I was supposed to be in the ring with him. I beat him because I'm simply more talented than that broken down pile of rubble. Basically, I was in the ring with Lesnar and The Undertaker because Smackdown needed me in the ring with those guys. They were making the main events a little dull and predictable. A little "Mattitude" changed all that completely.

BROCK: Yeah, that "Hell In A Cell" match at No Mercy that you weren't a part of, that sure was dull and predictable, wasn't it? Are you nuts? That was one of the most brutal matches that I've ever seen, and if you had shown up during it, you probably would've ruined it!

HARDY: Again, I don't know where this is all coming from. You guys, you're like all the people who used to cheer me on. People like you used to say how I was underappreciated and how the quiet Hardy boy might be the more talented one. Now look at you. I finally make good, and all you guys can do is criticize me. I walked out on Raw and joined Smackdown for less of an insult.

WELSH: If you think we're being unfair, go ahead and walk out. We're just about out of time anyway.

HARDY: No, you're not just about out of time—you're out of time completely. □



It appears we've seen the last of Team Extreme in WWE. Both Hardys have gotten the chance to pursue singles careers since Matt accepted Stephanie McMahon's offer to join Smackdown, and it's hard to believe that either Jeff or Lita wants anything to do with "Mattitude."

You Can Hate Eddie

That Eddie Guerrero (below) is such a sneaky character that it's such fun to see people like Rikishi give him what he has coming to him in the ring. It's also fun to watch Eddie find new ways to cheat to win (left). But it's also wonderful to see such a genuinely good person who has gone through so much enjoy some much-deserved success.

Guerrero

But You Have To Love Him, Too

"While Guerrero has spent the past several years creating a masterfully loathsome character in the ring, the very real events that have shaped his life outside the ring—a challenging work environment, a spate of critical injuries, and substance abuse—produced a man that only the heartless can't at least quietly root for."

By Frank Krewda

THE SNEER, THE ridiculous mullet, the exaggerated accent, the persistent self-absorption, and all those confrontations with established WWE superstars like The Rock, Ric Flair, RVD, and Edge. Boy, Eddie Guerrero sure gives his detractors plenty of reasons to hate him. And they rarely pass up a chance to voice their contempt.

Somehow, though, Eddie commands an equal measure of respect—some might even say affection—from those who have watched him overcome a series of personal challenges that have transcended professional wrestling.

While Guerrero has spent the past several years creating a masterfully loathsome character in the ring, the very real events that have shaped his life outside the ring—a challenging work environment, a spate of critical injuries, and substance abuse—produced a man that only the heartless can't at least quietly root for.

"Eddie Guerrero is one tough man," said Jim Ross. "He's had more than his share of challenges, and he's bounced back every time. He's a resilient son of a gun, and that's why he's been able to make a go of it here in the WWE. He's proof that quitters never win and winners never quit."

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL WOUNDS

Eddie's love/hate (mostly hate) relationship with the fans goes way back. Long before he showed up in the WWF with fellow Radicals Chris Benoit, Perry Saturn, and Dean Malenko in January 2001, WCW fans had had their fill of him.

The way he used to bully nephew Chavo Jr., tried to steal the mask of Rey Misterio Jr., and mistreated members of the Latino World Order left fans seething. And creating those infamous "Eddie Guerrero Is My Favorite Wrestler" and "Cheat To Win" T-shirts drove the wedge even deeper.

Behind the scenes, however, this most despicable heel cut a sympathetic figure. A major car crash on New Year's Day 1999 had left him with a broken hip and punctured liver, among other injuries. Even worse was the psychological damage Eddie sustained. The fact that Eddie's smashup involved just one car—his—left everyone speculating as to what factors might have contributed to it.

Guerrero used the next five months not just for physical rehabilitation, but for spiritual healing as well. While rebuilding his leg strength, Eddie became recommitted to his faith in God.

Finally, when he emerged on a special Memorial Day episode of *Nitro* as a guest commentator, Eddie thanked WCW and Eric Bischoff for sticking by him through his difficulties. But even a physically and spiritually whole Guerrero had no idea how fate would push him once again to his limits in the next several months.

When he was arrested on DUI charges soon after being released from rehab last fall, Guerrero gave WWE no choice but to release him. But he didn't wallow in self-pity. He hit the indy circuit, where he often competed against young athletes such as Mike Quackenbush, and showed WWE he was serious about putting his life and career back together.

TAKE THIS JOB AND SHOVE IT

Despite retaining the ability to stoke fans into a frenzy, not to mention world-class wrestling skills, then-WCW President Eric Bischoff admittedly doubted Guerrero's (and all undersized performers') potential to draw viewers. It was a position confirmed by the NWO's success.

And Bischoff held firm to his formula—big, established stars equal big numbers—even though the growing ratings gap between *WCW Monday Nitro* and the WWF's *Raw* suggested Bischoff's reliance on older, established stars was no longer working. New stars were needed at the main-event level.

Month after month, reports surfaced that Bischoff

Guerrero has not only been back in WWE since April—he's been back at the top of his game in WWE since April. He follows great matches with more great matches against foes such as Edge (opposite page). He won *PWI's* Comeback of the Year Award in 1999 (above). Check next month's *PWI* to see if he wins it a second time.

severely rebuked unhappy midcard wrestlers, including many cruiserweights, in front of other WCW performers whenever they sought a change in direction.

In the long run, Guerrero's conflict with Bischoff might have done nothing to elevate his position within the company, but it did cement his underdog image against Bischoff. And that endeared him, to some extent, to many fans. After all, even if they castigated Eddie for treating Chavo so shabbily, they were firmly in his corner in a fight against the foundering WCW system.

Fed up with the ever-changing carousel of WCW creative executives, the direction of his career, and the prospects of going down with a sinking ship, Eddie, Malenko, Saturn, and Benoit took new WCW head honcho up on his offer to give them their unconditional releases and walked out of WCW on January 17, 2000. They walked onto the set of *Raw* exactly two weeks later.

BACK TO THE BUMPY ROAD

The love/hate relationship continued in the WWF. Naturally, fans were juiced about the influx of such special talent, but Eddie was part of an outside contingent, The Radicals, that specialized in sneak-attacking fan favorites such as Mick Foley. So the fans booed him.

But before anyone could make up their minds about how they felt about The Radicals, Eddie went down to injury once more. This time, he demolished his elbow performing a frog splash in his very first match in the Federation. Two more months on the sidelines.

"That sure was an ugly one," Ross said. "Not only because he suffered a real painful injury, but he'd just come here in a sound frame of mind. He was off to a new start and it just short-circuited like that."

Once again, Eddie faced a round of painful rehab. But soon after he returned, he struck gold as the hilariously untrustworthy "Latino Heat," Chyna's love interest.

Eventually, however, Eddie lapsed back into chemical dependency. WWE helped Guerrero confront his addictions by insisting on and paying for rehab. When he got out, he competed on a series of house shows in order to sharpen his skills and prepare for his reintroduction to storylines on TV. Then came another setback, another auto accident, this one a collision between his car and the front gate of his apartment complex. With it came a DUI arrest and subsequent notification that he had been released by WWE.

During his absence, Eddie sharpened his skills by wrestling on the independent circuit, in England, for the fledgling World Wrestling All-Stars, and for New Japan. He also saw his marriage fall apart. But he personally resolved to defeat his demons this time.

In April of this year, he got the call that he had been waiting for: WWE had been watching him and was willing to give him one more chance.

Once again, Eddie's superior performances have returned him to the pinnacle of his profession, which is where he belongs. Boo Eddie Guerrero the wrestler, if you must, for his antics in the ring or on the microphone usually warrant a hostile and passionate response. But reserve one cheer in the back of your mind for Eddie Guerrero the man. He truly needs and deserves one. □

Guerrero had one nice run as a WWE fan favorite when he provided Chyna with some of his special "Latino Heat." He ruined that by cheating on his "*Mamacita*." That's okay. He prefers to make people hate him when he's wrestling. And he's so good at it. Just keep in mind that when the cameras are off, he's a different person, one who is to be admired.

the next wave

Is SUPERSTARDOM Ahead For These WWE Hopefuls?

By Harry Burkett

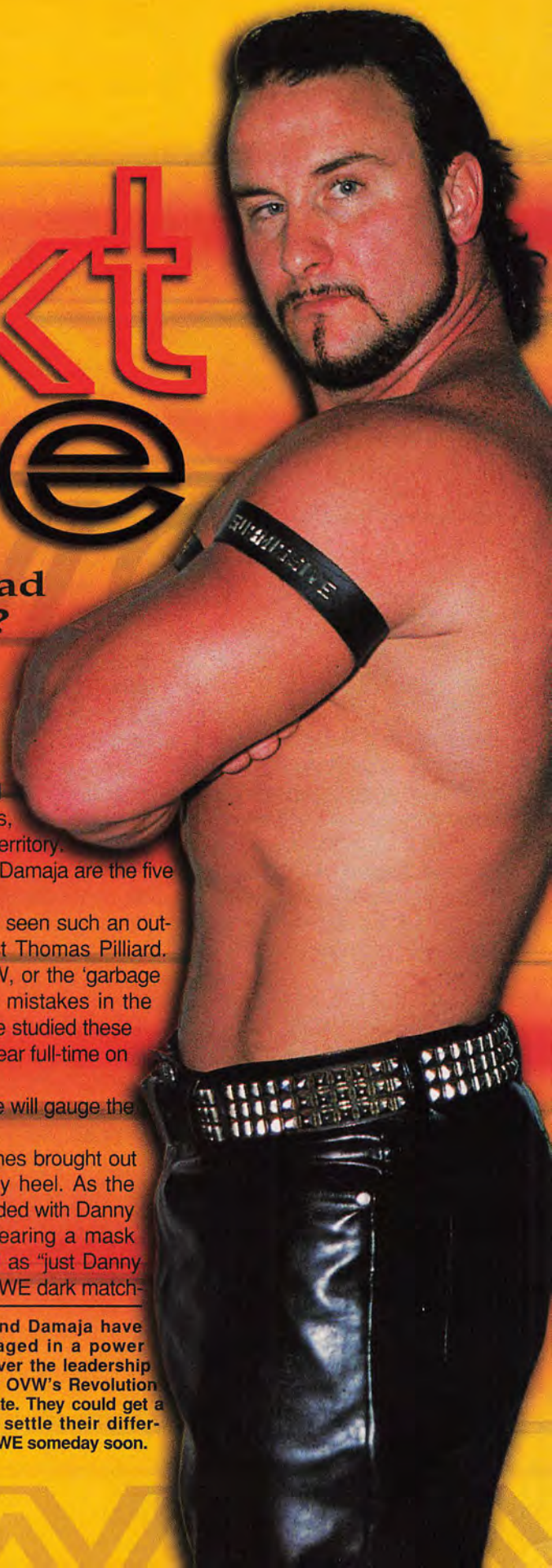
THERE WAS THE "New Generation" of the early-1990s, which saw the rise of superstars such as Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Diesel, and Razor Ramon. Then there was "Attitude," which gave birth to Steve Austin, The Rock, and Triple-H. Now WWE is introducing a new wave of superstars, most of them from the Ohio Valley Wrestling developmental territory. R.C. Haas, Shelton Benjamin, Doug Basham, Redd Dogg, and Damaja are the five hottest prospects in the WWE system.

"I've been following WWE for many years, but I have never seen such an outstanding crop of talent ready to emerge," said WWE analyst Thomas Pilliard. "These guys haven't been burdened by bad gimmicks in WCW, or the 'garbage wrestling' label of ECW. They've already made their rookie mistakes in the obscurity of small venues throughout Kentucky and Indiana. I've studied these guys pretty closely over the last six months, and when they appear full-time on WWE television, I think they have a shot to be fantastic."

With the help of Pilliard and OVW promoter Jim Cornette, we will gauge the potential of these five Ohio Valley stars.

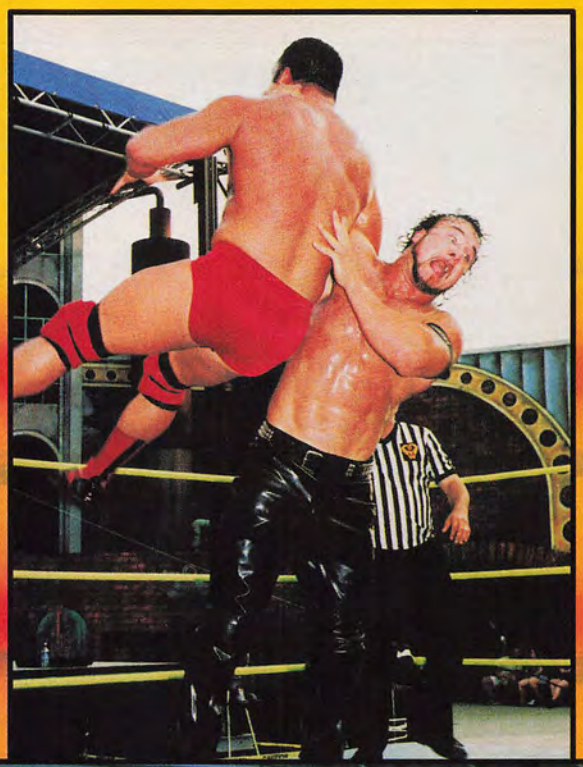
DOUG BASHAM: A series of intriguing OVW storylines brought out Basham's true potential, especially as a conniving, dastardly heel. As the masked Machine, he became leader of The Revolution and feuded with Danny Davis, his uncle, for control of OVW for several months. Wearing a mask allowed him to demonstrate his talent without being dismissed as "just Danny Davis' nephew." It was ingenious. He has wrestled in several WWE dark matches recently, and has also appeared on *Velocity.*

"Basham is the thinking man's wrestler," noted Cornette. "We've had our share of trouble, and I hope he'll be in WWE full-time real soon just so I can get him the hell out of OVW. Let's see how long he bullies Stephanie McMahon or Eric Bischoff."



Basham and Damaja have been engaged in a power struggle over the leadership position of OVW's Revolution clique of late. They could get a chance to settle their differences in WWE someday soon.

Unlike a lot of developmental hopefuls, Doug "Machine" Basham (right) isn't a young stud. He's been around for nine years, and until recently, few gave him a chance of making it in WWE. But he has shown a lot of skill and charisma in OVW (not to mention the kind of raw strength he's putting on display here). He's a legitimate top prospect now.



Like Basham, Damaja (below) was a force in OVW before it became a WWE developmental territory. He handled new Raw stud Randy Orton rather well a few times when they hooked it up in Ohio Valley.

Shelton Benjamin (shown against Damian) hopes he doesn't become the forgotten member of The Minnesota Stretching Crew. He won three OVW Southern tag titles with a guy named Brock Lesnar. If he does half as well in WWE as Lesnar has done so far, he'll have accomplished a lot.

"This guy's a nine-year veteran and, as the saying goes, there's no substitute for experience," said Pilliard. "With some of the young guys just getting in the game and moving up the ranks today, the biggest problem is deflating their egos. They think they're great right from the start. Basham's character may be arrogant, but I bet he's down to earth. Having your tail kicked in Kentucky about a hundred times will do that to you. He wants it as much as anyone in OVW."

DAMAJA: Now that Basham is competing in WWE more often, Damaja is on the verge of becoming the de facto leader of The Revolution, which would make him OVW's top heel. Damaja has already gotten involved in a series of matches—along with Basham, Rob Conway, Nick Dinsmore, and OVW champion Nova—to earn a match against Kurt Angle on OVW television and a spot in the 2003 Royal Rumble.

"I've never seen anybody more determined to get ahead than that no-good Damaja," said Cornette. "He's a two-time OVW champ, so he's talented—there's no doubt about that. If Basham goes to Smackdown, then Damaja should go to Raw. WWE doesn't need those guys hookin' up in the same place."

"Damaja's another guy who was homegrown in OVW, slow-simmered to become a good wrestler," said Pilliard. "He could give the southern, old-school perspective to any promotion, and I think he'll adapt quickly to WWE if he's given a chance. And you have to like his hairstyle."

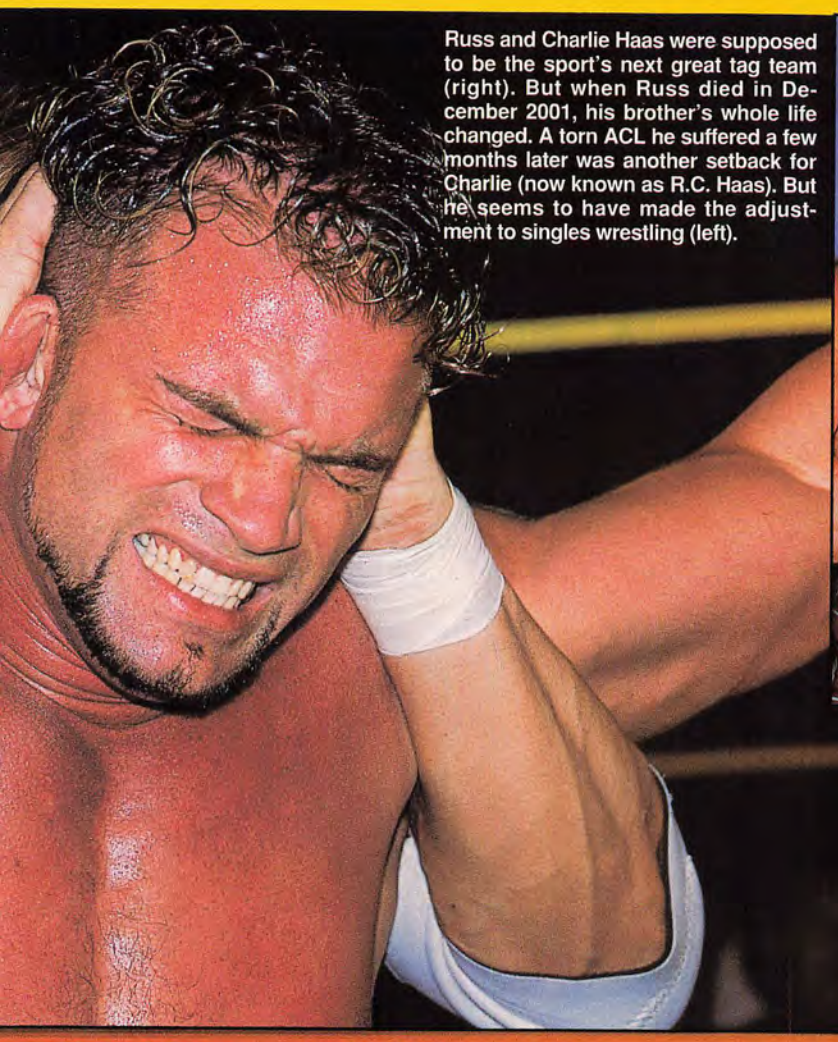
SHELTON BENJAMIN: Who is the man who might have the key to beating Brock Lesnar? The unlikely answer is Shelton Benjamin. At 6'2" and 245 pounds, his size is average for a WWE superstar. And he has a chance against Lesnar?

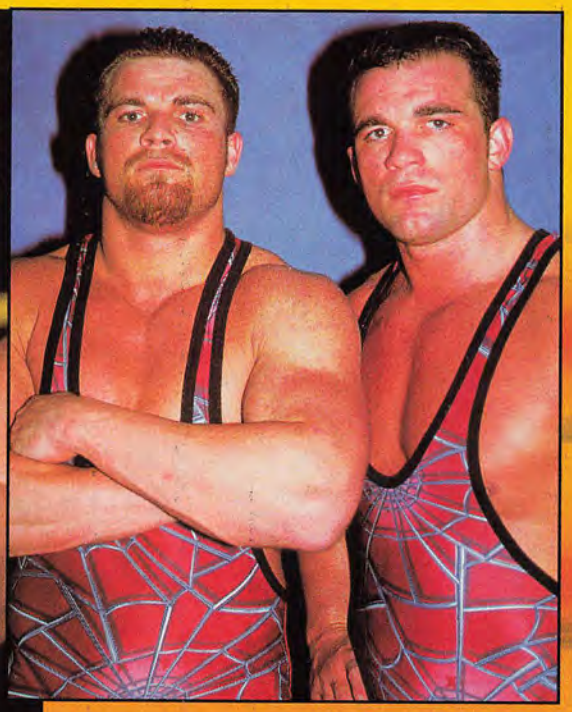
Actually, Benjamin was Lesnar's long-time partner in Ohio Valley, where they captured the Southern tag team title three times. Like Lesnar, Benjamin was an amateur standout. As a two-time NCAA All-American at the University of Minnesota, he is a master of the mat science. Unlike Lesnar, he's an innovative high-flyer.

"Shelton was kept down here in OVW until he was honed to perfection," said Cornette. "Just look at his body! You could shred lettuce on those abs. I had to keep a pack of smelling salts at the announcers' table for all the women who fainted in the front row."

"Anytime you get someone like Brock Lesnar or Kurt Angle or Shelton Benjamin, you have someone with a built-in knack for pro wrestling," commented Pilliard. "Everyone says amateur and pro wrestling aren't related, but they require the same kind of dexterity. Shelton has the raw ability to be put in the same league as Lesnar and Angle ... just wait and see."

R.C. HAAS: After Russ Hass died of heart disease, Charlie adopted the initials "R.C." to honor his younger brother and tag team partner. R.C. Haas was an amateur star, but pro wrestling was always his first love—not a career fallback. His experience as a tag team specialist has given him a tremendous sense of timing, even in singles matches. He's a decent brawler, too. Think of this Oklahoma native as something of a combination of "Dr. Death" Steve Williams and Kurt





Russ and Charlie Haas were supposed to be the sport's next great tag team (right). But when Russ died in December 2001, his brother's whole life changed. A torn ACL he suffered a few months later was another setback for Charlie (now known as R.C. Haas). But he seems to have made the adjustment to singles wrestling (left).

Angle. Man, no wonder Jim Ross loves this guy.

"R.C. Haas was a natural for this business who trained like a madman, so he ought to make it big," said Cornette. "He has a good look, he's got charisma, and he's a fine all-around athlete. What else could you want?"

Pilliard shared Cornette's sentiments. "R.C. has had a rough past couple of years, but he seems like a tough one to me. I was worried when he tore his ACL earlier this year, which put off his training and WWE debut. I saw him recently in a dark match, though, and he was superb. He's handled all the adversity that's been thrown at him like a pro."

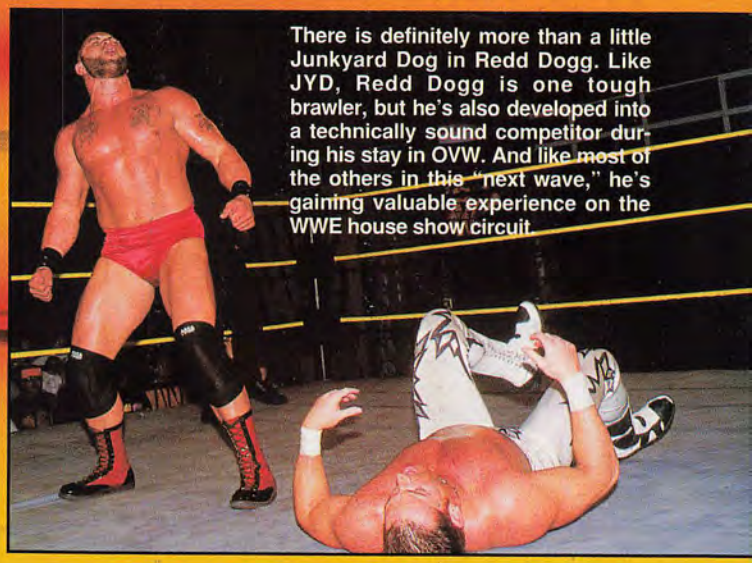
REDD DOGG: As his name indicates, this former collegiate football player was a protege of Junkyard Dog. After gaining prominence as Redd Dogg Begnaud in NWA Southwest, he headed for Ohio Valley, where he replaced Brock Lesnar as Shelton Benjamin's partner in The Minnesota Stretching Crew. He became extremely jealous when WWE officials awarded Benjamin a full-time contract. Benjamin felt the wrath of Redd Dogg (who is now being called Badd Dogg in OVW) before he could get out of OVW. And that was while they held the OVW Southern tag belts together!

But Redd Dogg might get his chance at WWE greatness soon as well.

"When I see Redd Dogg wrestle, I feel like the ghost of JYD has come back to haunt me!" exclaimed Cornette. "Because he's gone through so much training here in OVW, he might be more technically sound than JYD, though. But he's still a damn tough brawler, and WWE could use a few of those."

"Oh, my goodness, I do see the resemblance to Junkyard Dog," said Pilliard. "Still, I think Redd Dogg would say he's a little prettier. His ring style isn't that pretty, but it isn't meant to be. I always thought he and Shelton Benjamin was an odd pairing. That would make a great feud in WWE. Benjamin might bite the dust!"

Keep this guide handy when these stars become regulars on the TV set in your living room. Considering how Brock Lesnar's career has taken off, Redd Dogg vs. Damaja could headline WrestleMania a year or two from now! □



There is definitely more than a little Junkyard Dog in Redd Dogg. Like JYD, Redd Dogg is one tough brawler, but he's also developed into a technically sound competitor during his stay in OVW. And like most of the others in this "next wave," he's gaining valuable experience on the WWE house show circuit.

ROCKY HORROR!

He Won't Forget What You Did Last Summer

By Frank Krewda

WRESTLEMANIA X8, TORONTO, Ontario, Canada. The Rock and Hulk Hogan are standing in the ring before a packed house of more than 68,000 fans.

MEDIUM SHOT: *(Bell rings)* After circling each other twice, The Rock and Hulk Hogan lock up collar-and-elbow and break after a stalemate *(Crowd chanting "Rock-y! Rock-y!")*.

Cut to ...

MEDIUM SHOT: The Rock and Hogan lock up again. Hogan sends The Rock reeling into the turnbuckle *(Crowd chanting "Ho-gan! Ho-gan!")*.

Cut to ...

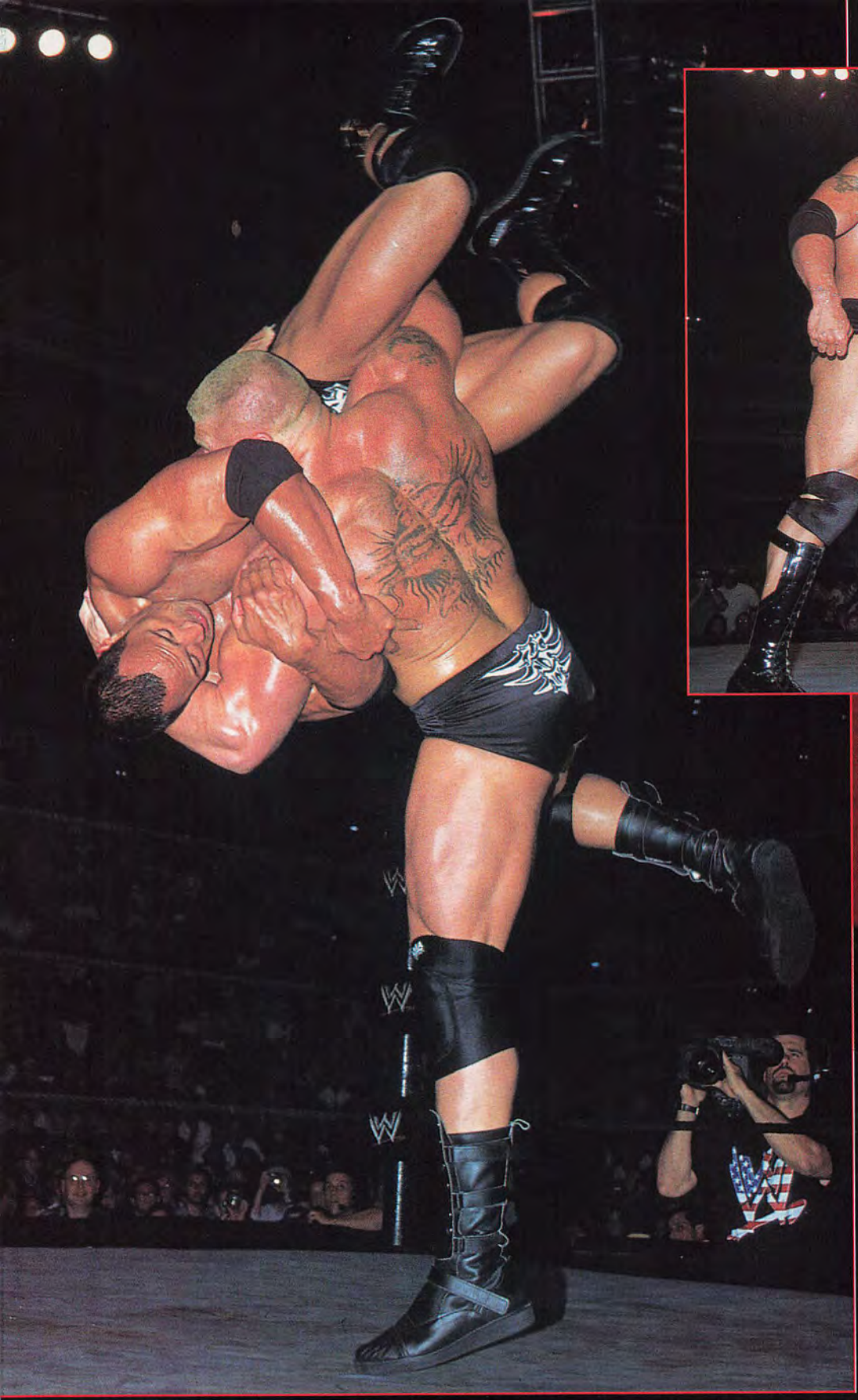
HEAD SHOT: A determined-looking Rock wipes his mouth before rising to his feet.

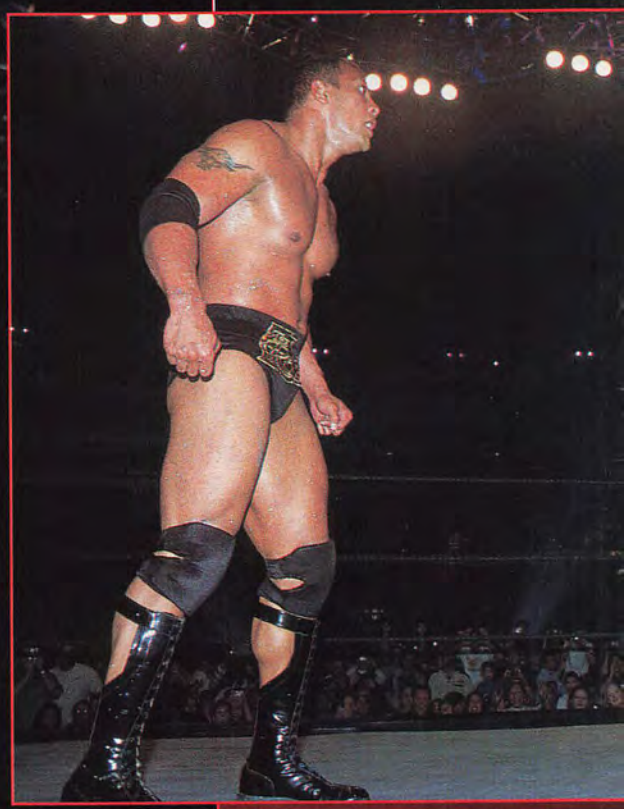
Cut to ...

MEDIUM SHOT: Hogan moves in to lock up again, but The Rock lands a boot to Hogan's midsection, bringing Hogan to his knees *(Crowd chanting "Rock-y sucks! Rocky sucks!")*.

No, this isn't one of the scripts Rock is reading in preparation for making his next motion picture. Rather, it's a depiction of the horror scene that unfolded before his eyes and ears at WrestleMania X8 this past March 17, when he cleanly defeated Hulk Hogan by pinfall in the center of the ring. A horror scene that reprised itself at SummerSlam, when The Rock lost his WWE World title to Brock Lesnar.

In both matches, The Rock, "The Great One," "The Brahma Bull," the man who long ago declared *himself* champion of the people, checked himself into the Smackdown Hotel—right there at the corner of Jabroni Drive and Know Your Role Boulevard—to re-



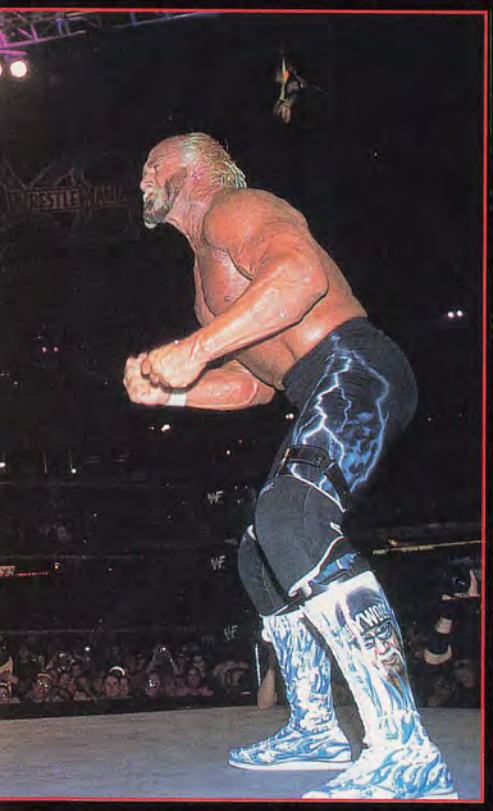


As if remembering the night thousands of New Yorkers cheered as the villainous Brock Lesnar pounded on him at SummerSlam wasn't bad enough (left), The Rock also still remembers how the fans abandoned him in his match with Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania (above). He won't forget two betrayals in the span of six months!

visit the cascade of boos and vulgar chants fans heaped upon him so frequently during his early WWF career.

Just as the images from *The Exorcist* have stuck with so many children of the '70s, the experience of having the fans rally against him has stuck with The Rock. In his feud with Hogan, most WWE experts—even The Rock himself—chalked up the fan reaction to Hogan's stature in the business and good ol' nostalgia.

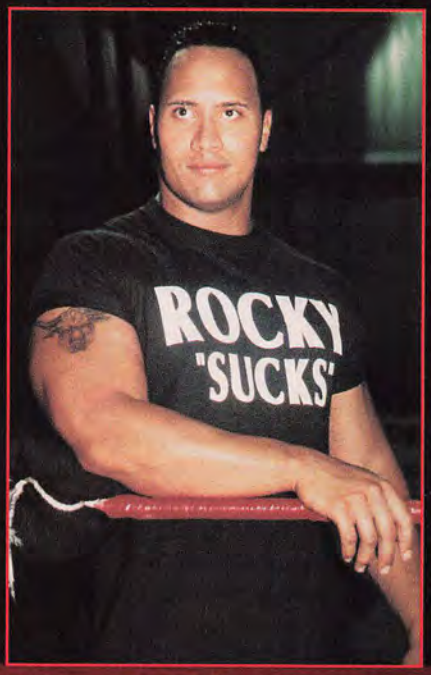
Nevertheless, he put a good spin on the uncomfortable situation when he was interviewed by wwe.com after dropping his title to Lesnar. Even though he was visibly upset when the vociferous Long Island, New York, crowd refused to let him do his "Finally, The Rock ..." routine once the cameras stopped rolling (they booed much too loudly and passionately for him



to get more than a few words out), he said he was fine with the reaction, even if he didn't necessarily expect it.

"I thought it was unbelievable, in a great way," he said. "I absolutely love that. I thrive off that energy and that vibe. Just as jacked up and geeked as I get when they're behind me, I do the same when they're against me. And they know that I thrive off that. I've always thought that, boo me or cheer me, that's your hard-earned dollar that you've spent. You have every right to do whatever you want."

Despite the firm grasp Rocky claims to have had on the situation, WWE executives handled the reaction less stoically. Backstage sources said Vince McMahon was so rattled that he ultimately decided to hold Rock off the air the next night at *Raw* for fear that the fans would boo him, cheer Lesnar, and turn their entire program upside-down. And boo him the Madison Square Garden crowd did when his *image* appeared on the Titan Tron during a video played before the show started. Had he appeared live to say goodbye for now to the crowd, well, let's just say it could have been an ugly sendoff for Hollywood's hottest new action film megastar.



Five years ago, The Rock thrived on being hated by fans to a point at which he proudly wore T-shirts bearing the simple derogatory phrase that so many fans chanted at him. We know he has it in him to be a tremendous heel.

Was that a look of determination on Rock's face as he went to war with Lesnar outside the ring, or was it a look of anger in response to the crowd reaction? Rock claims the boos at SummerSlam didn't bother him at all. His actions when he returns to WWE might suggest otherwise.

"That was crazy," The Undertaker said after the show. "I know the fans can be fickle sometimes, but they sure had it in for The Rock that night. I gotta give him credit, though, because he handled it like the real pro he is."

Of course, like most WWE superstars, Rocky is a true pro, indeed. Sure, he might have bowed out gracefully without manifesting the hurt and anger he experienced at SummerSlam. But those close to him believe the latest dose of incivility dented The Rock's armor, that he felt betrayed and will want to make others feel the pain of betrayal that he felt.

"It's so easy to upset an egomaniac like The

"Like most WWE superstars, Rocky is a true pro, indeed. Sure, he might have bowed out gracefully without manifesting the hurt and anger he experienced at SummerSlam. But those close to him believe the latest dose of incivility dented The Rock's armor, that he felt betrayed and will want to make others feel the pain of betrayal that he felt."

Rock," said Paul Heyman, Lesnar's agent. "Take him out of the spotlight for a split-second and he becomes completely unhinged. I swear I saw him turn three different shades of green. I actually enjoyed watching The Rock's reaction when they chanted Brock's name. He was seething!"

Say what you will about Heyman, but Rocky is a proud peacock who needs to feed his ego constantly. Tumbling from the heights he's reached —whether it's temporary or not—could prompt The Rock to dedicate a little more time to wrestling again.

Or, as some WWE superstars suggest, chewing on such a turn of events for too long might just spark a metamorphosis—a change that sees The Rock turn his back on the fans, his WWF compatriots, and maybe even professional wrestling itself. Or maybe The Rock will take this opportunity to show Hollywood his range as a performer. They thought he was brilliant as the charismatic conquering wrestling hero, didn't they? Wait until he shows what he can do as the bitter, spiteful, sadistic villain. It would be the perfect pre-emptive strike. If he returned to WWE rings as a heel, he'd never have

WILL HEARING THE BOOS CHANGE THE ROCK?

While millions—and millions—of Rock's fans are anxious to see if their recent lack of support will affect his performances, current WWE superstars—all of them potential opponents for The Rock when he returns—have an equal interest in his frame of mind when he returns from filming his latest movie.

To get the pulse of the WWE locker room, Pro Wrestling Illustrated polled seven of Rocky's contemporaries:

TRIPLE-H

"Will The Rock change? Quite frankly, I don't think it matters, because I'll kick his ass regardless of his frame of mind. But seriously, as much as I hate the smug S.O.B., I really don't think so. He's accomplished so much in WWE, so why mess with success? Because a few fans booed him? What the hell do those people know anyway?"

KANE

"I've wrestled with The Rock and against him, and I've always thought he could be more sinister in the ring. I've always thought that if he had a little more killer instinct in him, he'd be the ideal tag team partner. Maybe the pain he went through will give him that edge."

CHRIS JERICHO

"We'll probably hear him whine all about it when he comes back. Oh boy, I really look forward to hearing The Rock whine. But what will be genuinely funny will be watching him try to survive if he doesn't have every ass clown out there in the crowd hanging on his every word and move. I don't think he has it in him to show the kind of mean streak I've shown. I'd like to see him try, though."

Y2J wants to see The Rock get mean

RIC FLAIR

"Take it from me, brother, The Rock is a real pro. He knows when to take the fans to heart and when to shut them out. Right now, Rock's rested, he's focused, he's in control. I doubt he'll let a few naysayers throw him off his game."

KURT ANGLE

"Yes. The Rock's a jellyfish. He's probably sitting in some fancy trailer out there in Hollywood sobbing because the fans cheered for Brock Lesnar instead of him. Well boo-hoo! Get over it, pal! Everything The Rock does—and I mean everything—is geared to get a rise out of the fans. If the crowd doesn't get behind him, The Rock's a lost man. And *that* is true."

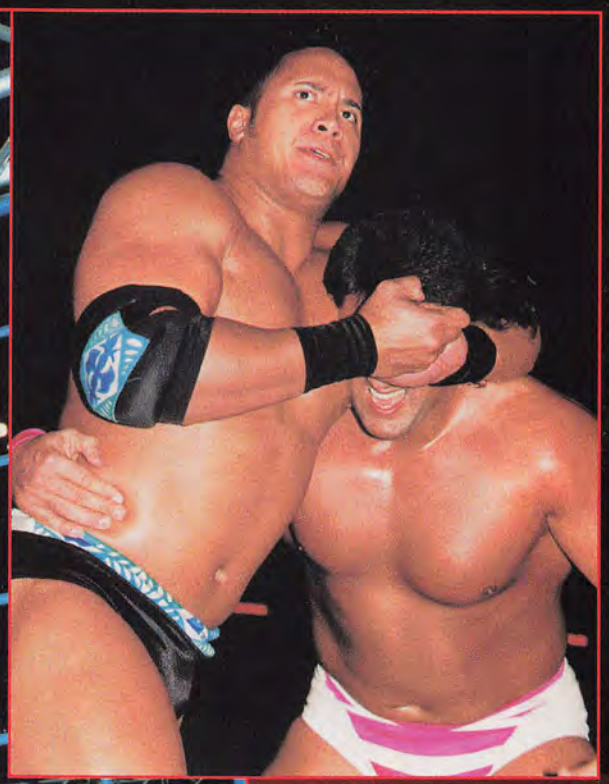
BROCK LESNAR

"He'd better change if he expects to beat me anytime soon. I proved I was the better man at SummerSlam, and obviously a lot of people agreed. So, from my point of view, I'd say The Rock has some serious adjustments to make."

ROB VAN DAM

"What can I say? The Rock's already an excellent performer, although like everybody else, he's no Rob Van Dam. Nobody could be. If I were The Rock, I'd stick to whatever it was I did best and leave all the thrill-making to RVD."

—Frank Krewda



Could history repeat itself in his situation? Rock was so good as a heel in feuds with superstars such as Mankind (left) that people grew to love him. A few years earlier, when he was trying to fight the good, clean fight against undercard wrestlers like Sal Sincere (above), he was reviled. Maybe another strong heel run will help win the fans' adoration again.

to stumble around looking for an answer to the question of why the very people who made him a star, the people who made him *The Rock,* can no longer stand the sight of him. There would be no concerns over his box office appeal as a movie star. "They hate me," he'd explain, "because I want them to hate me and because I *made* them hate me."

'Taker predicts a change by which The Rock will try to prove his superiority through sadistic tactics designed to hurt (not simply defeat) opponents and, more importantly, his fans.

"I've had the fans turn on me five times in one night," he joked. "And each time they bailed on me, I turned up the beatings just a little bit more. I put a little more snap in my punches, a little more feeling in my kicks, and a little more back into my choke-slams. It was probably murder on the poor saps that had to fight me, but the people out there got the point."

The fans, too, have made their point—they'll no longer voice support for a part-time superstar who dabbles in WWE wrestling. But once The Rock gets finished shooting his latest film and the WrestleMania XIX hype really begins, WWE and its fans might just have to pay for what happened in August. He remembers what you did last summer. He'll *always* remember what you did last summer. □

Even the WWF security guards didn't think Nicole belonged in the ring. After this legal fiasco, Bass would be lucky to even tussle a security guard on an independent show.

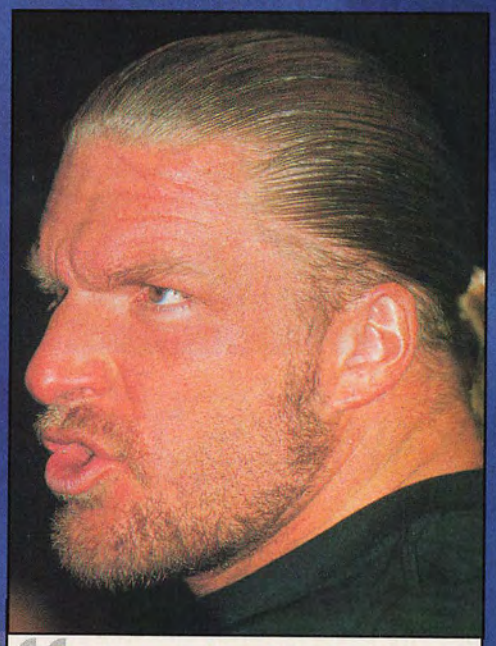
Nicole Bass' FISHING EXPEDITION

Jury Doesn't Take Bait In Suit Against WWE!

By Harry Burkett

ERIC BISCHOFF'S "RAW Roulette" wheel would have fit nicely in the sixth-floor Brooklyn courtroom that held the trial of Nicole Bass vs. World Wrestling Entertainment this fall. The antics that went on during the sexual harassment lawsuit were (unintentionally) just as entertaining as any edition of *Raw* or *Smackdown*. All the trial needed was Jim Ross and Jerry Lawler calling the action.

Bass originally filed the lawsuit with the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of New York in September 2000 for $120-million, which was $10-million more than Rena Mero (Sable) had sought in a similar suit only a few months earlier. Bass claimed she was fired from the company after repeated incidents of sexual harassment and physical abuse. WWE countered that Bass' clum-



"There wasn't a lot that Nicole could do in the ring and make it look good."

siness prompted her termination after only five months, and that her lawsuit was nothing more than golddigging by a disgruntled former employee. Over a two-week period, the courtroom attendees were treated to a star-studded trial with hints of tragedy and lots of comedy.

Both sides presented their opening arguments on September 17. Bass' lawyer, Kathleen Tomlinson, stated that male wrestlers had made sexual advances toward the 6'2", 230-pound bodybuilder, and that men often paraded in and out of women's locker rooms. The most sensational allegation was that "Brooklyn Brawler" Steve Lombardi, who currently works behind the scenes in WWE, had pushed her against a wall, grabbed her breasts, and pressed his groin against her body during a plane trip to England in May 1999.

Attorney Laura Brevetti asserted in Lombardi's defense that no one had witnessed the

From The Ring To The Courtroom ...

WWE'S TOUGHEST LEGAL BATTLES

Nicole Bass' sexual harassment lawsuit was only the latest in a long series of court cases involving WWE. In fact, its lawyers rarely get a break as spurned ex-employees make desperate attempts for easy cash, out-of-control superstars get the company in trouble, or WWE causes its own legal turmoil. Here are WWE's 10 most important legal disputes:

U.S. vs. Vince McMahon (1994): The WWF owner was acquitted of possessing anabolic steroids and conspiracy to distribute steroids to wrestlers following a two-week trial and 16 hours of jury deliberations. He had faced up to eight years in prison and a $500,000 fine.

WWF vs. WWFE (2000): The World Wide Fund For Nature was awarded exclusive right to the acronym "WWF" because of the World Wrestling Federation's violation of a 1994 agreement, which prevented it from using the initials outside North America.

The Hart family vs. WWFE (2000): An out-of-court settlement was reached for $18-million, to be divided among the late Owen Hart's wife, Martha, his two children, Oje and Athena, and his parents, Stu and Helen. Hart suffered a fatal fall at the Over the Edge PPV in 1999.

Charles Austin vs. Titan Sports (1994): Austin was awarded $26.7-million from the WWF as the result of a tag team match against The Rockers in 1990. A Rocker dropper had paralyzed the preliminary wrestler from the waist down.

Rena Mero vs. WWFE (2000): Mero settled out of court for an undisclosed sum and agreed not to use the "Sable" trademark. She had filed a $110-million lawsuit for unfair trade practices and intentional infliction of emotional distress, among other charges.

WWE vs. PTC (2002): WWE won $3.5-million and an apology in a settlement with the Parents Television Council. The PTC wrongfully implicated WWE in a young girl's death and misrepresented the number of companies that had pulled their ads from *Smackdown*.

John Stossel vs. Titan Sports (1985): ABC reporter John Stossel received $280,000 in a settlement with the WWF after wrestler David Shultz slapped him on both ears during a *20/20* expose of wrestling. Stossel said the attack caused permanent ringing in his ears.

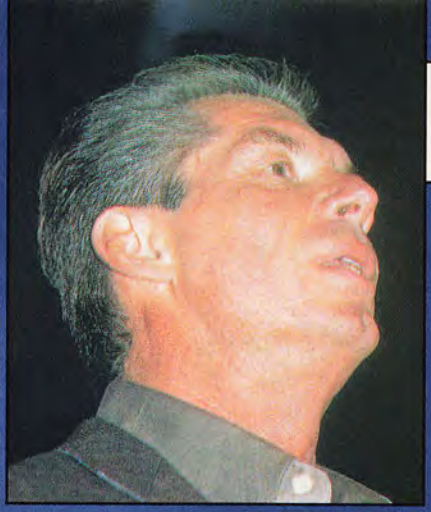
The Sable suit got settled

Richard Belzer vs. Titan Sports (1985): Belzer received an undisclosed settlement following a $5-million lawsuit. Hulk Hogan had injured Belzer with a front facelock on the comedian's cable-television show, *Hot Properties*. Belzer needed nine stitches.

Jesse Ventura vs. Titan Sports (1994): A federal jury in St. Paul, Minnesota, awarded Ventura $809,958, most of which was compensation for his color commentary that was featured on WWF videotapes. Ventura had sought $2-million in the lawsuit.

Bassam Al Othman vs. Titan Sports (1997): The host of *Good Morning Kuwait* was paid an undisclosed sum several months after Vader attacked him on television. The money wasn't for the attack, but for the WWF's use of the footage for Vader's entrance video.

—Harry Burkett



"She just didn't have the coordination to develop her skills. In our business, she was not a world-class athlete."

alleged "commotion," which was supposed to have occurred in plain view of other passengers. WWE attorney Jerry McDevitt said the real issue was Bass' lack of talent in the ring and charged that the chokeslam was the only maneuver she could perform.

The first celebrity witness was WWE Chairman Vince McMahon. During his two hours on the stand, McMahon said to Bass, "You're just trying to throw dirt against the wall, trying to make something stick," and added that she had "two left feet." Summarized the boss: "She just didn't have the coordination to develop her skills. In our business, she was not a world-class athlete."

On September 23, Bass revealed a tidbit that had to delight smart fans. Bass said the long-term storyline plan was for her to wrestle Chyna on pay-per-view and to marry The Undertaker. When attempting to describe The Undertaker, Bass said, "He's a guy, Mark. He's like the prince of darkness."

The next day, the proceedings seemed like a "From The Vault" segment, as McDevitt

Nicole Bass was big enough and strong enough to fit in the role of bodyguard in the WWF a few years ago. She could certainly look intimidating when she attacked female wrestlers such as Malia Hosaka (above left) and Tori (above right). Many of those who worked with her in the WWF, however, claimed she didn't offer much in the way of wrestling skill.

"If it was a respectable person [making the accusations], I could be tarnished. I never felt tarnished for one second."

played videotapes of Bass' lackluster performances in the ring. Jurors also learned how minor a star Bass was in wrestling when she was depicted as a hulking bodyguard who rarely spoke and never even left her feet during any of her matches. One specific tape depicted Bass "mistakenly" hitting Val Venis over the head with a guitar and growling, "I want your slide trombone in my brass section."

McDevitt compounded Bass' embarrassment by asking to show tapes of "good" wrestlers.

"I'm not going to let you create a production to be shown in Brooklyn Federal Court," replied Judge Nicholas Garaufis. "The next thing I know, you're going to be directing a steel cage in here."

Also during the September 25 testimony, Bass claimed she was "horrified and disgusted" when Shawn Michaels called her "Mister" on live television. But the day turned out to be pivotal for Lombardi and WWE, as the defense lawyers went on the attack. Brevetti forced her into admitting she had joked about suing the company during an appearance on Howard Stern's radio show. Bass was also challenged regarding her claim that Lombardi had arranged for her to be hit with a non-collapsible guitar on TV.

"Why would someone hit me with a non-gimmicked guitar?!" exclaimed Bass, who was reduced to tears. "Why would I have to go through all the things I went through at the WWE in such a short time? It was not right."

Brevetti said that after Lombardi's alleged groping, Bass went on to eat two dinners, take a nap, help flight attendants pass out chocolates, and talk with other female wrestlers on the airplane.

The courtroom didn't have a TitanTron, but that didn't stop Rena Mero from testifying via videotape the following day. Mero said that, in her situation, Vince McMahon had broken his promise to depict her Sable character as a "classy" and "strong, intellectual woman." Instead, officials asked her to expose her breasts on television and participate in a lesbian storyline.

"I told them I was uncomfortable even being asked to do that, and I would in no way agree to do it," stated Mero, who was twice featured in *Playboy*.

Raw champion Triple-H, whom

Bass vs. Debra was another physical mismatch. But as so many wannabe WWE stars have discovered, it takes more than just an unusual look or great physique to make it big in the wrestling business. Bass didn't come close to convincing a jury that she had been wronged by Vince McMahon's company.

Bass accused of rudely entering the women's locker room at will, was next on the stand. Although courtroom employees mobbed him for autographs, he was not accompanied by his Motorhead entrance theme. He did at least sip on spring water during his testimony.

Triple-H admitted he entered the women's locker room while he was dating Chyna, but did so only after getting permission. "To me, it would be disrespectful to women," he said. "I would knock on the door and ask for Chyna to come out ... or I would ask if everyone was decent."

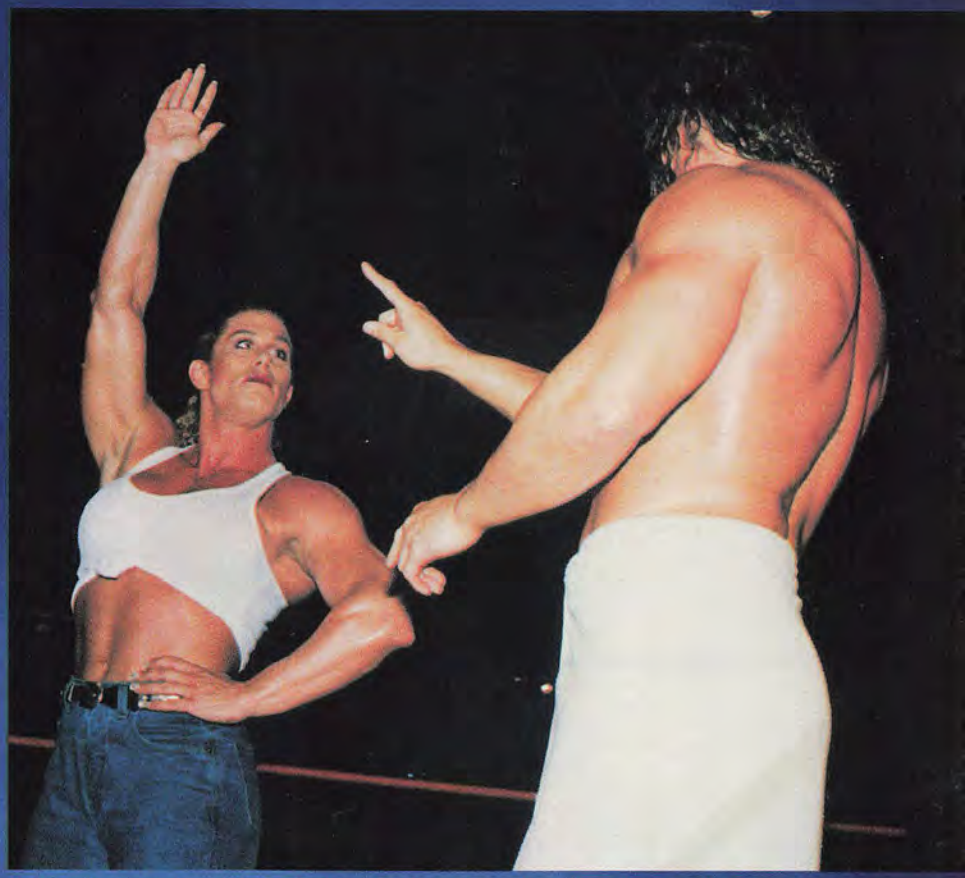
"The Cerebral Assassin" insisted he didn't recall a specific incident cited by Bass, who said Triple-H had once surprised Alicia Webb (Ryan Shamrock) while she was going to the bathroom. Triple-H was effective, however, in supporting WWE's argument that Bass was a klutzy wrestler.

"Nicole had a look which the WWE was banking on, that being a physically imposing female that really turned heads," he said. "But there wasn't a lot that Nicole could do in the ring and make it look good. She couldn't get the moves. She was not coordinated for it." Triple-H claimed Bass had ruined the one match they wrestled in together, adding, "It's a tough business."

To add to the comedy, he was even asked whether his relationship with Stephanie McMahon was serious. As Linda McMahon sat at the defense table, Triple-H responded, "With her mother here, I consider it a serious relationship."

"The Game" expanded upon his comments regarding Bass outside the courtroom. "I feel ... that she's trying to make a buck," he told the *New York Post*. "I don't take it personally. She picked a visible name."

The last bit of fireworks occurred during closing arguments on October 7. "Ms. Bass is a simple, uncomplicated person," said Tomlinson, depicting her client as an innocent victim. "Nothing can justify being assaulted or threats to her physical well-being."



Although the judge didn't want the trial to turn into a "production," it did on many days. At one point, those in the courtroom got to see videotape of a bizarre in-ring exchange between Bass and Val Venis.

McDevitt, who questioned whether Bass was really a woman during the trial, said the plaintiff wanted to score a big payday by "smearing good, innocent men." Added the WWE attorney: "There isn't one person who works at WWE who would risk their dream job to walk in the locker room and see her naked."

On October 8, the jury of six men and two women returned their verdict: a victory for WWE. Lombardi's wife cried with relief.

Lombardi told the *New York Daily News* that he didn't feel tarnished by the trial. "If it was a respectable person [making the accusations], I could be tarnished," he said. "I never felt tarnished for one second."

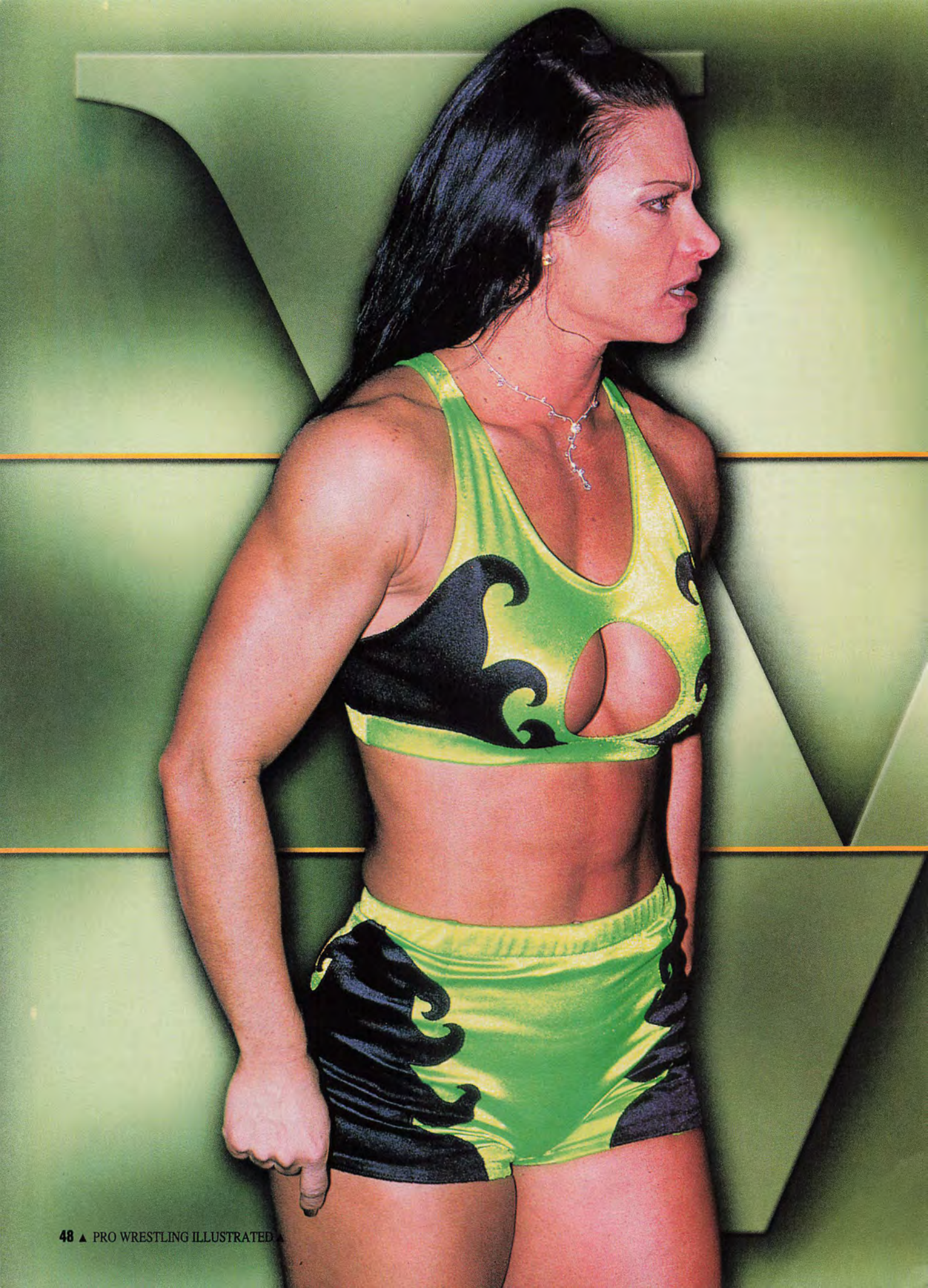
Regarding Bass' lawsuit, 63-year-old juror Jim Singletary told the *Daily News*, "It was like a fabrication."

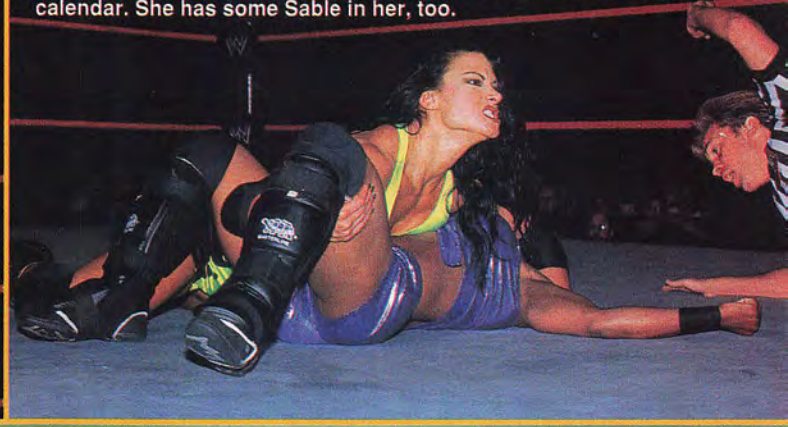
And after Lombardi signed his juror pass, 44-year-old Cliff Hasey said, "She just wanted money."

In reference to Bass' specific charge that male wrestlers had entered the female locker room without permission, 39-year-old juror Pete Sutich said, "It was never proven whether they were announced or unannounced. On many occasions, they were invited in."

Bass tried to leave with her dignity intact. "I'm a little person," she said. "I'm not a big corporation. I stood up for my rights and the rights of women. I'm really glad I did what I did."

McDevitt didn't buy that, either. "Nicole's just trying to put lipstick on a corpse. This was a money-grabbing publicity stunt since Day One." □





The anger and aggression that are such a huge part of Victoria's game are evident on her face as she battles Jacquelyn (left and below). That's the tough, mean, nasty side of the newest WWE diva. She has a little Chyna in her. But she's also a very beautiful woman who looks great on, say, a calendar. She has some Sable in her, too.

VICTORIA'S *No Longer A* SECRET

"She's A Cross Between Chyna And Sable"

By Liz Hunter

WWE HAS MADE stars out of innumerable women in its illustrious history, but only a select few have impacted the promotion in the long term. In fact, in the past 10 years, only two women—Sable (Rena Mero) and Chyna (Joanie Laurer)—did so much for the promotion that they established themselves as true wrestling icons. All of the rest either left WWE without fanfare or continue to wrestle for Vince McMahon today.

Luckily for us, WWE's current women's division is currently cresting. No less than four women are competing for icon status, and there's a good shot that they all might achieve it by the time they retire. Stacy Keibler will never—and we mean never—amount to much in the ring, but when it comes to popularity, she could end up being WWE's most celebrated diva ever. And Torrie Wilson is right there with her.

"With her muscular physique and long, raven-colored hair, she could almost be mistaken for Chyna. WWE officials, however, see more than a would-be Chyna when they look at Victoria. They see a woman who might eclipse Chyna on WWE's all-time divas list."

Lita broke new ground by proving that North American audiences will accept females as risk-taking high spot artists. And Trish Stratus makes us all remember that just because a woman is stunningly beautiful doesn't mean she'll be a liability in the ring.

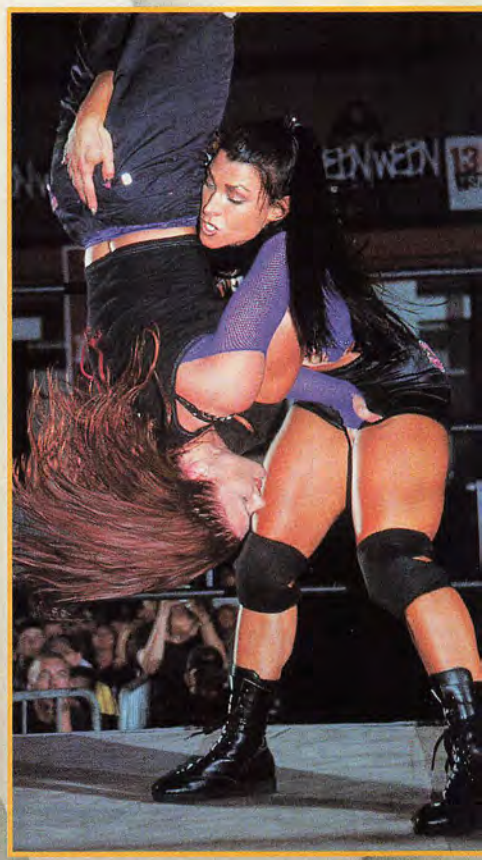
And there's a fourth WWE diva that's just *starting* to turn heads. Her name is Victoria, and even though she's been part of WWE's roster for a scant few months, she's already being touted as a diva with huge potential.

"I've seen a lot of young women come through these doors," said Jim Ross, WWE's senior vice president of talent relations, "but I haven't seen too many like Victoria. She has what it takes to be a star in this business, and I'm not just talking about her pretty face. I'm telling you, the girl is all heart. She came to us with big dreams, and we told her what she had to do to make it in our company. And darn it if she didn't do it. That drive to win, that determination to succeed, that's a rare thing, but Victoria has it in spades."

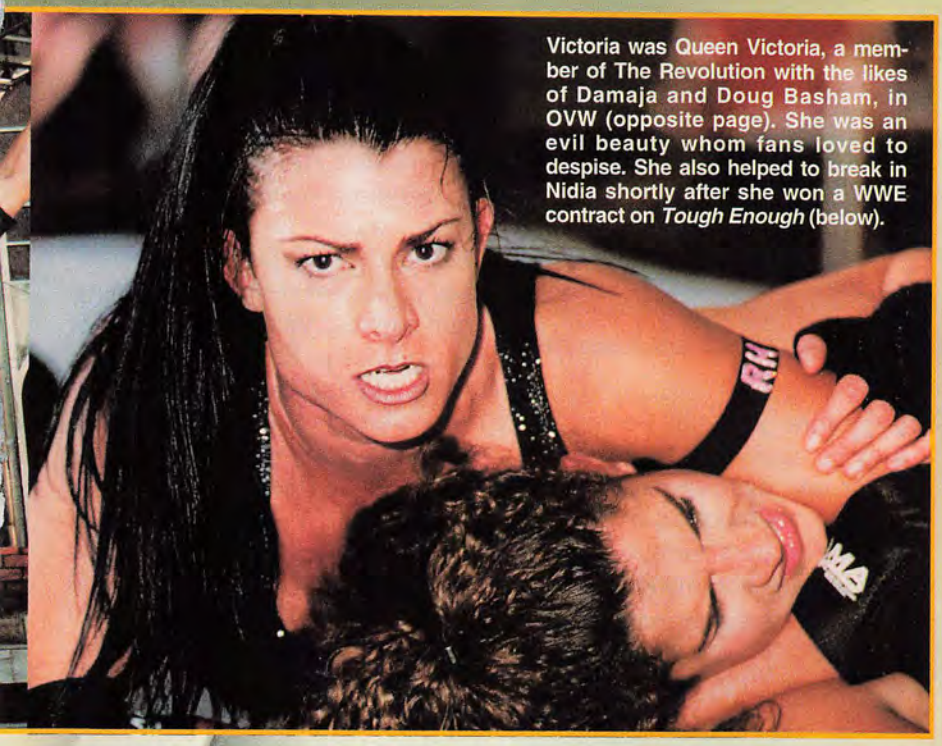
Ross should know. It was only a couple of years ago that he received a videotape of a young woman named Lisa Marie Varon in the mail. She had previously appeared in a vignette with Scott Hall on WCW and later struck up a conversation with Chyna at a gym. A few days after receiving and viewing the tape, he gave the former middleweight bodybuilding champion, magazine cover girl, and organ harvester (becoming a doctor was once her ultimate goal) a call. Not long after their conversation, "Victoria" enrolled in Rick Bassman's UPW wrestling school in California, and Bassman, the man responsible for launching the careers of Sting and The Ultimate Warrior in the mid-1980s, worked his new student hard.

"Training under Rick was difficult, because he pushed and pushed and pushed until you wanted to quit," Victoria said, pulling her jet-black hair behind her head and putting it into a ponytail. "I refused to break, though. Everyone was surprised to see me come back the next day. I was like, 'I'm still welcome, right?'"

Not only was Victoria welcome, she became one of Bassman's star pupils. She soaked up everything that she was taught and craved more. Eventually, the long days of running the ropes and taking bumps



Until Victoria was finally added to the main WWE roster, she had to keep working, keep improving, and keep looking for new things to add to her repertoire. Occasionally on a special show, she'd get a chance to wrestle someone like Lita. But she didn't complain about having to spend so much time in the developmental territories. It's all paying off.



Victoria was Queen Victoria, a member of The Revolution with the likes of Damaja and Doug Basham, in OVW (opposite page). She was an evil beauty whom fans loved to despise. She also helped to break in Nidia shortly after she won a WWE contract on *Tough Enough* (below).

Someday—if she's so inclined—this diva will be able to tell her grandchildren that she began her WWE career ... as a ho for The Godfather. That was, indeed, her first exposure to WWE. She was one of the two hos (with Mandy) caught in the shower with Eddie Guerrero during his hot storyline with Chyna.

for hours at a time paid off with a short stint in WWE as one of The Godfather's hos. But after Godfather became The Goodfather and power-bombed Victoria through a table, that angle came to a devastatingly violent close and Victoria was sent to WWE's developmental system. Long stints in Memphis Championship Wrestling and Ohio Valley Wrestling sharpened her skills, as she got to concentrate on wrestling rather than showmanship in matches against other developmental talents. She even got to wrestle some actual WWE divas, like Molly Holly and Lita, from time to time.

But now Victoria is back on the main roster, and this time she isn't a ho or even a respectable valet. She's an angry, aggressive full-time wrestler, and a darn good one at that. She combines beauty with raw power, sex appeal with brute force. In fact, with her muscular physique and long, raven-colored hair, she could almost be mistaken for Chyna. WWE officials, however, see more than a would-be Chyna when they look at Victoria. They see a woman who might eclipse Chyna on WWE's all-time divas list.

"Look at her," said Ross. "Look at that hair, those muscles. There's even a facial resemblance, and that's great, but that's not why we hired her. We see the potential for even more promise. Sure, she's big and powerful, but she's also a beautiful woman. She's sensual, but not in an overpowering way. She's not an Amazon."

"I was watching a match between her and Trish Stratus the other day, and it just hit me that she is the most exciting all-around female wrestler to come to WWE in a long time," added WWE expert Thomas Pilliard. "Trish Stratus is damn good now, but she had to improve on the fly after she got here. WWE made sure Victoria was pretty polished by the time she got here. They kept her a secret for a while, but now everyone knows what she has to offer. I was just talking to a guy who has trained a lot of women wrestlers, and we agreed that she's a cross between Chyna and Sable. She's taken some of the best attributes from both and meshed them rather nicely."

A cross between Chyna and Sable? Could be. No other female on WWE's roster combines physicality (one of Ross' favorite words) and beauty so comfortably. Lita is pretty and wrestles that way. Stratus is downright beautiful, but she's a bit too cute to pull off the tough gal routine. Victoria, on the other hand, is pretty close to the total package.

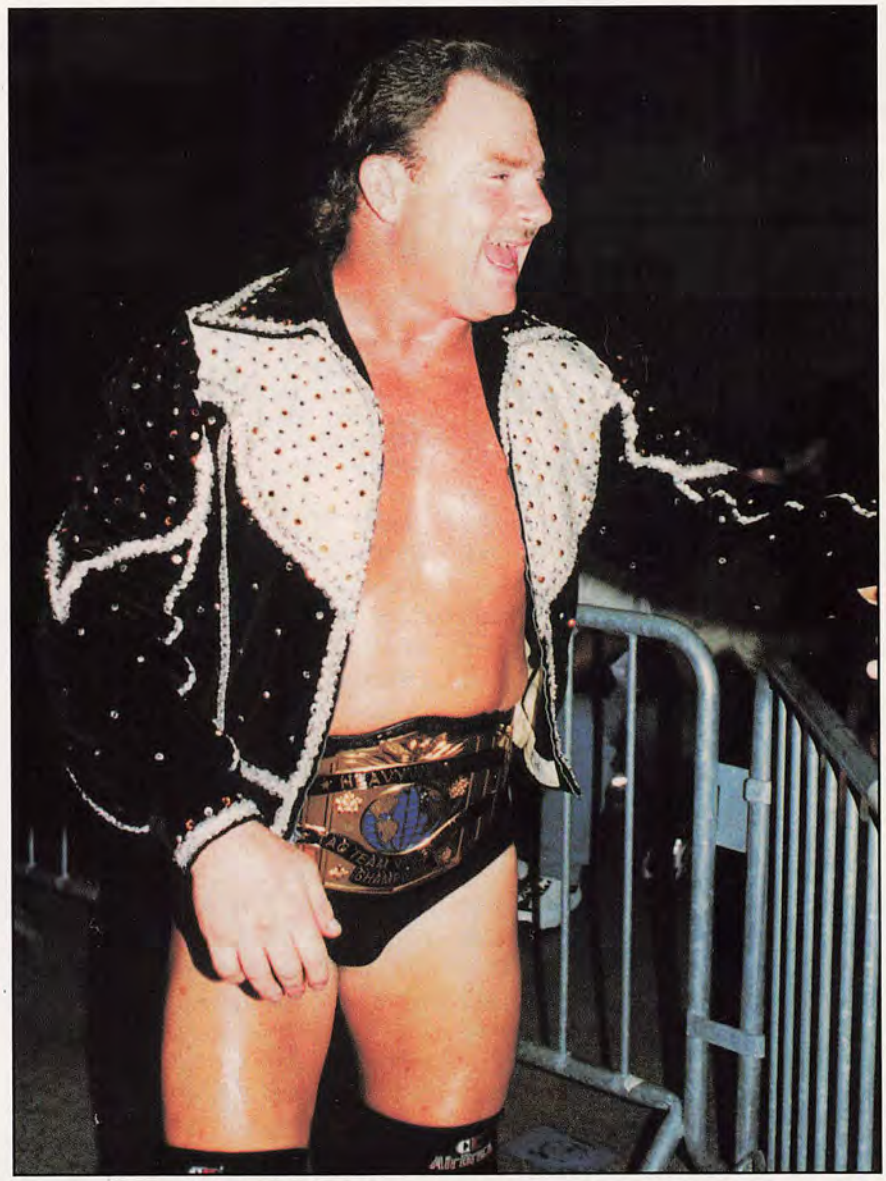
Of course, Victoria has a long way to go before she'll actually be in Chyna or Sable's class, and such comparisons right now aren't fair. While her looks and talent have us predicting big things, she still has a lot to learn.

Then again, if she is part Chyna and part Sable, maybe the wait won't be that long. Chyna didn't become *Chyna*, the phenomenon, until years after her WWF debut, but Sable became *Sable* soon after she debuted. Maybe Victoria is closer than we think to becoming *Victoria*. Our advice: Don't blink. You might miss the transition. □

the business page

By Harry Burkett

Total Nonstop shakeups ... NWA-TNA continues to defy the odds by remaining a viable alternative to WWE, and has gained further financial stability by forming a partnership with Panda Energy International. So far, the energy company is only a financial investor and has not attempted to interfere in the booking of the promotion. The joint venture will be known as TNA Entertainment, LLC.



Former WWF wrestler Brian Blair came very close to pulling off a Jesse Ventura-like upset (albeit on a much smaller scale) on Election Day 2002.

Read a press release: "The entire JSE [Jarrett Sports Entertainment] team remains in place and will continue to produce weekly NWA-TNA Total Nonstop Action pay-per-view events."

Oh, really? At the same time TNA disclosed this new partnership, rumors persisted that creative team member Vince Russo had left the company. Reportedly, Russo lost a "power struggle" with co-owner Jerry Jarrett, who had asked Vinnie Ru to take a supporting role on the creative team.

On the TNA Web site, Jeremy Borash vehemently insisted, as the press release indicated, that the entire JSE team would remain in place—and that the rumors were just plain wrong. "Inaccuracies don't do us any favors, and often times are hard for me to ignore personally, especially when so many of us have completely dedicated our lives to this project," he stated. "I think we have proven over time that information from this entire Web site has and always will be trustworthy, and I personally respect our fans too much to try and mislead them."

Russo remained conspicuous by his absence from the TNA pay-per-view the following week. This TNA controversy has worsened the combative reputation Russo earned in WWE and WCW and could freeze him out of the business completely—unless Borash is right and the wrestling media is totally off the mark. But we're suspicious.

From the election desk ... Brian Blair, best known for teaming with Jim Brunzell in The Killer Bees, didn't come close to shocking the *world* on Election Day, but he sure came close to shocking Hillsborough County. Running as a Republican in Florida, Blair attempted to unseat two-term commissioner Pat Frank and was ranked as the underdog throughout the campaign.

A last-minute ad blitz targeting younger voters almost allowed Blair to score an upset, however. Hulk Hogan endorsed Blair in one com-

Even though it's been more than four years since Jesse "The Body" Ventura was elected governor of Minnesota, it's still hard to believe the man became so powerful. He *really* had a lot of political power back in the fall.

mercial, which ran frequently on local television, especially during *Raw* on election eve. Blair led in the polls during most of Election Day, to the amazement of political analysts. The Democrat incumbent, though, eventually garnered a total of 148,992 votes (51 percent), compared to Blair's 144,608.

In a related story, Paul Ellering placed a distant third in his campaign for a seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives. The former manager of The Road Warriors ran as an independent and received 1,816 votes, which amounted to 11 percent of the total vote. Republican Bud Heidgerken earned 55 percent, while Democrat Bruce Shuck received 34 percent. Although Ellering made a respectable showing, he had hoped to do better in a state that elected independent candidate Jesse Ventura to the governorship in 1998.

Looks like "Precious" Paul will have to stick to weightlifting, dog sledding, and reading the *Wall Street Journal* in the future.

Power in the palms of his hands ... Remember when Vince McMahon bragged that "the fate, the very fate of WCW" was in his hands? It was an accurate statement, and McMahon never appeared to be more powerful than at that moment in March 2001. But that power paled in comparison to the tremendous power in Jesse Ventura's hands in early-November.

When Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone died in a plane crash during the final days of his election campaign against Republican challenger Norm Coleman, Ventura had the job of appointing someone to serve the final two months of Wellstone's term. The winner of the race between Coleman and Wellstone's replacement, former Vice President Walter Mondale, would replace Ventura's appointee in January. Ironically, Coleman, a former mayor of St. Paul, was one of two candidates Ventura had defeated to become governor.

All eyes were on Ventura, because if he appointed a Republican, the balance of power in the U.S. Senate would change instantly. That was considered a possibility when Ventura walked out of Wellstone's memorial service, which had adopted the tone of a Democratic campaign rally. Instead, Ventura appointed Dean Barkley, an independent who had persuaded "The Body" to get into politics in the first place.

Governor Ventura stated that he had a long memory, and remembered how Republicans and Democrats had kept independents out of the political process. Ventura, whose gubernatorial term expires in January, is creating controversy until the very end. No doubt Jesse hopes controversy will create cash!

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of October 1-31)

30-Day High: 8.87 on October 2
30-Day Low: 6.76 on October 16
52-Week High: 15.83 on March 20, 2002
52-Week Low: 6.76 on October 16, 2002

WWE stock dropped to 6.76 per share on October 16, which isn't just a 52-week low, but an *all-time* low. In today's turbulent economic climate, WWE simply isn't going to gain traction as long as its television ratings and pay-per-view buy rates are perceived to be on the decline. Also, WWE warned it would suffer a $3-million loss in its second quarter.

But that doesn't mean the entire WWE corporate empire is in ruins. WWE continues to set records and make vital in-roads into the international market. Tickets for Survivor Series at Madison Square Garden, for example, were sold out in four days, surpassing WWE's previous MSG gate record of a $1.1-million for the 2000 Royal Rumble. WWE had not revealed the 2002 gate at press time.

WWE's "Road To Rebellion," a four-day tour through Europe, attracted 43,000 fans and generated $2.2-million in revenue. The tour rumbled through Hartwell Arena in Helsinki, Finland; Odyssey Arena in Belfast, Northern Ireland; MEN Arena in Manchester, England; and Sheffield Arena in Sheffield, England.

Likewise, WWE announced an ambitious international schedule for 2003, which will include stops in South Korea, Japan, South Africa, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, France, Italy, the U.K., Thailand, Australia, Germany, and Singapore.

TV breakdown

Week beginning October 7

Raw (TNN): 3.8

Analysis: Sure, this special Las Vegas edition of *Raw* was full of gimmicks and glitz, but what else would you expect from "Sin City"? The WWE production team created graphics with a gambling theme, and Eric Bischoff's spinning head was hilarious. The "*Raw* Roulette" wheel was also clever. It was somewhat fitting that the Katie Vick storyline started on this show. The TLC main event, which Kane won, was daredevil hardcore wrestling at its best.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.6

Analysis: General Manager Stephanie McMahon launched a tournament to establish the first WWE *Smackdown* tag team champions on this program. Rey Misterio Jr. and Edge scored an upset over the unlikely duo of Tajiri and *Smackdown* heavyweight champion Brock Lesnar. Another mysterious storyline was introduced as a sexy gal named Tracy claimed she was The Undertaker's mistress. And they call him "The Dead Man"?

Velocity (TNN): 0.8

Confidential (TNN): 0.8

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 0.8

Week beginning October 14

Raw (TNN): 3.8

Analysis: "You screwed Bret!" signs filled Montreal's Bell Centre, but bitter Canadian fans did enjoy Chris Jericho and Christian beating The Hurricane and I-C champ Kane for the Raw tag title. Also, Triple-H proved Steve Austin isn't the only wrestler who can drive a forklift, as he used one to block the locker room door of Raw fan favorites so he and his cronies could pummel Rob Van Dam in the lumberjack main event.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.4

Analysis: Kurt Angle and Chris Benoit set aside their heated rivalry to defeat the Guerreros and advance in the Smackdown tag team title tournament. The show managed to keep fan interest with the cliffhanger of whether The Undertaker would be allowed to wear a cast on his arm for his "Hell In A Cell" match against champion Brock Lesnar at No Mercy. It proved those simpler, old school angles can work—and are more believable.

Velocity (TNN): 0.7

Confidential (TNN): 0.6

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 1.0

Week beginning October 21

Raw (TNN): 3.7

Analysis: Triple-H donning a Kane mask and wearing a T-shirt that read "Big Freakin' Machine" is funny, but even the most calloused viewers were offended by Helmsley—masquerading as Kane—jumping into a casket to get it on with the corpse/mannequin of Katie Vick. Vince McMahon was obviously trying to hotshot the ratings with a new dose of "Attitude." Can those '97 tactics work in 2002? This particular one certainly didn't.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.7

Analysis: Keeping in mind that *Smackdown's* broadcast rating is worth more than *Raw's* cable rating in terms of overall viewers, *Smackdown* regained the lead after going neck-and-neck with *Raw* for the last few weeks. Chris Benoit, who had won the WWE Smackdown tag team championship with Kurt Angle at No Mercy, beat his partner for possession of the tournament trophy that went along with it.

Velocity (TNN): 0.6

Confidential (TNN): 0.5

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 1.1

Week beginning October 28

Raw (TNN): 3.4

Analysis: A video promo of WWE-bound Scott Steiner played on this edition of *Raw*. Also, Katie Vick was finally laid to rest as a result of Raw champion Triple-H's casket match against Kane. Shawn Michaels jumped out of the casket and nailed "The Game" with a superkick, which enabled Kane to throw Helmsley into the casket and claim the non-title victory. The rating for this show showed how poorly the Katie Vick storyline was going over.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.3

Analysis: UPN received a trick, not a treat, as the Halloween holiday caused *Smackdown's* overall rating to take a nosedive. The actual program was very good, however, as Rey Misterio Jr. beat Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar by DQ in the main event. Six competitors—Lesnar, Misterio, Edge, Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, and both Guerreros—deserve much of the credit for making *Smackdown* action-packed every week.

Velocity (TNN): 0.6

Confidential (TNN): 0.5

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 1.1

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the steel cage

By Liz Hunter

PRIMED FOR "BIG POPPA PUMP." Former WCW World champion Scott Steiner was the subject of a bidding war between Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff and Smackdown GM Stephanie McMahon at press time. I didn't believe this deal would happen at all. The conventional wisdom was that Steiner's body was too much of a wreck to make a long-term impact in WWE.

Steiner appeared to be less than 100 percent during his last World Wrestling All-Stars appearances in the U.K. and Australia, where he relied on quick lead pipe run-ins and three-way matches to hide his deficiencies. He finally captured the WWA title from Nathan Jones, but the match was far from a classic. Steiner, who was that rare breed of strongman and high-flyer at one time, didn't seem quite so sensational anymore.

While Steiner was in WCW, I heard that if he dropped something on the floor, he wouldn't bend over to pick it up for fear of severe back spasms. I even heard that he had to stretch and warm up for hours before matches. His chronically injured knees and ankles were heavily taped and braced so he could have some mobility in the ring.

WWE's signing of Scott Steiner took Liz Hunter by surprise because she had heard so much about his physical limitations. Then again, she heard some of the same things about Shawn Michaels. She expects "Big Poppa Pump" to give WWE a huge boost, even if he works a limited schedule.

But I heard those same kinds of stories about Shawn Michaels, too. And Michaels delivered a Match of the Year candidate at SummerSlam. I hope WWE will save Steiner's injury-prone body for television and main events. WWE really needs Steiner right now, and he would be the best addition to the company since Hulk Hogan returned in February.

Besides, an 18-month layoff from a full-time wrestling schedule might have done his body good. Training and relaxation can do wonders. Steiner is the most remarkable physical specimen in wrestling today. Maybe he just needed to take care of a few creaky hinges.

If "Big Poppa Pump" goes to Raw (seems likely), there's the possibility of a Steiner vs. Booker T rematch, Steiner vs. Rob Van Dam, and Steiner vs. Triple-H. On Smackdown, there could be Steiner vs. Kurt Angle, Steiner vs. Edge, and, of course, the moneymaker: Steiner vs. Brock Lesnar. Come on, Scotty, I'm ready for the hookup.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? Have you noticed that most of the Ohio Valley wrestlers with gimmicky names are reverting to their real names when called up to WWE? Leviathan became Batista, which is based on his real name. Likewise, Prototype became John Cena again. I like this trend.

At the risk of sounding like Matt Brock, guys like Bob Backlund, Harley Race, and Verne Gagne didn't need fancy showbiz names. Sure, there were characters such as Abdullah the Butcher, The Sheik, and even The Mummy, but I'd guess that 80 to 90 percent of wrestlers used their real names (or at least they sounded like real names). That gave more of a magical or foreboding aura to the wrestlers with weird gimmicks. But these stars had limited appeal because fans couldn't relate to them as real people. Abdullah and Sheik could make a lot of quick money in a given area, but had to move on before their acts went stale.

I'm sending a memo to Sean Waltman via this column. No, not Syxx, Syxx-Pac, X-Pac, or even The Lightning Kid. One of the reasons you had such trouble in WWE is because your gimmicks were burned out. It was not a reflection on your talent. Everyone

Syxx-Pac hasn't heard many chants including the word "sucks" since he joined NWA-TNA, but he might soon. Liz Hunter thinks he could freshen his character simply by dropping all the gimmick names and going by Sean Waltman.

knows your real name anyway. NWA-TNA fans might soon decide that Syxx-Pac sucks, but they're less likely to think Sean Waltman sucks.

TNA fans love your old rival Jerry Lynn. But if he had stuck with Mr. J.L., they might say he sucks, too.

ANALYZING THE EX-ANALYSTS. I ran into Donald Wayne at an independent show the other day. Long-time readers will remember Donald as our WCW analyst. Many fans ask me about the whereabouts of Donald, and even our old ECW analyst, Kevin Reynolds. Just because WCW and ECW went out of business, they assume Donald and Kevin are living in homeless shelters and holding "Will Analyze For Food" signs.

What did the analysts do? Actually, they were fans who held jobs in the business at one time and took wrestling very seriously. Whenever we had a WCW question, we would call Donald. He would know the latest attendance figures, potential acquisitions, and backstage gossip. He had several inside sources. Donald had been with our magazines since the late-1980s, while Kevin served as ECW analyst for only a short time.

For all of you who have worried about Donald's health and welfare, the man has a successful day job. Like Kevin and our WWE analyst Thomas Pilliard, he has experience in a number of backgrounds, including marketing and research. These guys offer perspectives that are quite different from those of typical wrestling journalists.

I won't accuse Donald of begging, but he was "intensely interested" in doing some TNA analysis. He also said something about "that damn Pilliard." I won't analyze that one.

It's a shame Stu Saks didn't realize Donald was still available. Stu offered me a new column in *PWI* called "Independent Roundup." Some of you might remember a similar column I wrote for *Wrestle America* a few years ago. It will be a thrill to report on the indy scene regularly again, and I hope you check out my first installment in this issue. You'll find it on page 70. □

strange list of the month

FIVE MORE DEEP, DARK SECRETS TO BE REVEALED ON RAW

1. Katie Vick set the fire that incinerated Kane's parents
2. DNA tests will prove Paul Bearer was Katie Vick's father
3. Rikishi used his car to run Katie Vick and Kane off the road
4. Katie Vick somehow survived, and her wrestling name is Vic-toria
5. Kane gave Tori a ride one day … and she hasn't been heard from since

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win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

IN SEPTEMBER 1979, Pat Patterson survived the steamy tropical climate of Rio de Janeiro to win a tournament and be declared the first Intercontinental heavyweight champion. We don't have an official record of the contenders he was *supposed* to have defeated in that tournament, whether they were WWF superstars, competitors from around the globe, Brazil's top athletes, or jungle-born tribesmen.

Something tells me Vince McMahon Sr. just said, "Take it!" after Pat fetched him a particularly good brew of coffee. Unlike today, when Eric Bischoff hands Triple-H a title belt and declares him a world champion, it was considered unseemly to simply hand titles to wrestlers back then. Verne Gagne was declared the first AWA World champion, but he had a rationale behind him: Supposedly the NWA wouldn't give him a shot at its World title.

Whether Patterson won the belt in Rio or Vince Sr. just handed him the belt in a seedy office in the bowels of Madison Square Garden, it doesn't really matter. Previously, Patterson had been recognized as the WWF North American champion, and he had emerged triumphant after a brutal feud with Ted DiBiase. Patterson was a worthy first champion.

Whether or not Pat Patterson actually earned the right to call himself the first Intercontinental champ is still a subject that can be debated, but there is no question that it quickly evolved into a very important championship. A lot of wrestling fans were sad to see it retired.

Why was there a need for a secondary title in the WWF? It had survived most of its 16-year history without one, and the AWA didn't see the need for one until the mid-1980s. Unlike the NWA's plethora of regional championships, the Intercontinental belt was never considered a steppingstone to the World title. If anything, winning the Intercontinental belt almost ensured the end of World title shots for any wrestler. That didn't really change until Hulk Hogan defended the WWF belt against Intercontinental champ Greg Valentine in a series of matches in 1986. Another noteworthy time was I-C champ The Ultimate Warrior defeating Hogan for the WWF title at WrestleMania VI. Even then, no one really considered abandoning the title completely.

When Vince Sr. ran the WWF, the World champion tended to be a fan favorite, so the other babyfaces in the Federation seemed to get the shaft most of the time. Because Bob Backlund was the champ in the late-1970s and early-1980s, the I-C belt was a sort of payoff for loyal employees like Patterson (who turned fan favorite during his reign) and Pedro Morales.

The same held true during Hulk Hogan's reign. Tito Santana and Rick Steamboat, for example, never received shots at Hogan. The I-C belt was their quiet reward. Sometimes the I-C belt was a consolation prize for heels who entered the Federation with much acclaim, but failed to win the World title. That happened with Valentine, Randy Savage, Rick Rude, and Curt Hennig. The I-C championship kept them hot after their World title aspirations had long run cool.

The Honky Tonk Man's reign defied all formulas and logic. It seemed to be Vince McMahon Jr.'s way of saying, "I can do whatever I want whenever I want." The Honky Tonk Man, the epitome of the WWF's one-dimensional gimmick

wrestler, defeated Steamboat, the pride and joy of old school NWA fans. Even worse, Honky beat Steamboat at a TV taping, so that meant the program wouldn't be syndicated nationwide for several more weeks. In the meantime, Steamboat was sent around to defend the I-C belt at house shows until the title change aired on television. Honky's 15-month reign will forever stand as the longest reign of all-time.

By the 1990s, McMahon was using the I-C belt to give future superstars some credibility. The Ultimate Warrior, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Steve Austin, Triple-H, and The Rock all used the Intercontinental rub to achieve main-event greatness further down the line.

When the European, hardcore, and cruiserweight titles came along, the Intercontinental championship diminished in importance. It was still the most prestigious of the secondary bunch, but the number of titles diluted its significance. Also, the I-C title changed hands so often that it was hard to keep track of who the champion was ... and even harder to figure out why anyone should care. Under Vince Russo's Crash TV philosophy, the Intercontinental belt became a mere storyline prop, no longer a way of investing in future superstars.

The WWE brand extension was the best chance for resuscitating the I-C title. With so much attention focused upon it on the Raw side, it seemed to be a coveted prize again—although the field of potential contenders had been cut in half.

But, as of October 20, 2002, the Intercontinental championship is no more. Raw champion Triple-H beat Kane for the I-C belt in a unification match at No Mercy. Perhaps WWE's way of giving the new Raw title some legitimacy was to have it gobble up the Intercontinental belt.

So the Intercontinental belt went into the dustbin of history, along with the WWWF North American, WCW U.S., WCW TV, and a countless number of other championships. Although I never really knew what the term "Intercontinental" was supposed to represent and how that denoted a different geographical area than the "World," I had profound respect for the championship and its lineage.

In fact, the first title change I ever saw on television was Magnificent Muraco beating Pedro Morales in Madison Square Garden. I remember Muraco taking a real cheap shot and kicking Morales below the belt, which was very rare in those days. Morales, the original "Latino Heat," lost his temper and kicked Muraco back. They writhed on the mat for a long time and barely dragged themselves by the ropes to break the referee's count. The action might have been slow, but it was darn realistic.

The Intercontinental title, despite its ups and down in significance, supplied us with great matches until the very end. Muraco-Morales helped turn me on to wrestling, and I bet Rob Van Dam vs. Eddie Guerrero did the same for a new generation of fans.

There were 49 Intercontinental champions over a 23-year period. That accounts for at least two new champions per year, not counting the repeat champions. Some forgettable champions made that exclusive club of 49. The Mountie, Marty Jannetty, Marc Mero, Val Venis, Road Dogg, The Godfather, Albert, and Test would make that list. The greatest I-C title match was Davey Boy Smith's victory over Bret Hart at Wembley Stadium in London. The most inspiring moment was Steve Austin fighting paralysis to pin Owen Hart at SummerSlam '97.

Patterson was the first champion. Kane was the last. Chyna was the only woman to hold the belt. Jeff Jarrett and Chris Jericho share the record for the most reigns—at five apiece. New York City's Madison Square Garden was the site of the most title changes.

That's an important history in this business. And it's a long way from Rio de Janeiro. □

All three men in this picture—Albert, Val Venis, and even The Godfather—can call themselves former I-C champions. That tells you that the title lost some of its prestige in recent years. Once the WWE brand extension went into effect, however, it looked like it might gain back some of that lost prestige.

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

THANK YOU, SCOTT STEINER.

If not for you, biggest poppa of all pumps, this edition of "The Straight Shooter" might not have been possible.

My colleague Harry Burkett moved a little faster than I did this month and banged out a column on the sadly now-defunct Intercontinental title. Since I'm not going to waste my time and yours by acknowledging the ridiculous Triple H-Kane imbroglio ("Ringside" has that covered), I was looking at burning 900 words discussing the emergence of Curt Hennig as a contender to the NWA heavyweight strap *(yawn!)* or speculating about Bob Sapp, the untested rookie sensation who is making the Japanese forget all about Big Van Vader and Bruiser Brody. Since Sapp's pro wrestling record at press time was only 1-0, it might be a tad premature to anoint him wrestling's *next* next big thing.

Whether he has some of his freaks hanging all over him or not, Scott Steiner is the kind of fresh main-event level talent that WWE needs right now. But Dan Murphy has reason to suspect Vince McMahon won't use Steiner as effectively as he could.

What else could I do? An in-depth look at Edge's inability to get over as a main-eventer? A "Where Are They Now" search for Lex Luger? The XWF invasion of WWC and the re-emergence of The Nasty Boys as a tag team force?

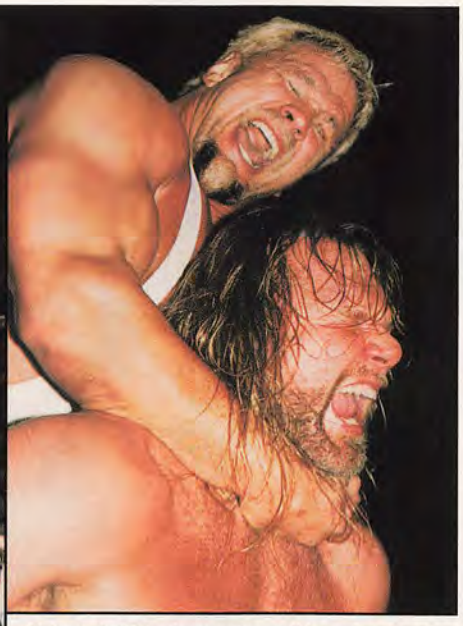
I was scraping a few inches below the bottom of the barrel—and then Scotty S. slapped his John Hancock on the dotted line of a WWE contract.

Let's all take a moment and give our thanks to "Big Poppa Pump."

And now let's take a look at what his signing means.

Steiner became a main-event talent in WWE on the day he signed that contract—or at least that's the way it should be. Steiner vs. Brock Lesnar could make for one of the most intriguing WrestleMania main events in years. Besides being physical monsters, both have extensive amateur wrestling backgrounds. If neither man is able to establish an edge in power, they both have a vast arsenal of ground wrestling weapons to unleash. Could it be as exciting as Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle? Believe it or not, it could. But that depends on how Steiner is promoted after making his WWE debut.

Vince McMahon is a truly strange individual. He acquires talent, then apparently suggests or even demands they no longer do what they do best. Lesnar is a remarkable athlete. If you've read these magazines, you know Lesnar is capable of executing a pretty impressive shooting star press. When a—forgive me—genetic freak is able to hit a move like



Although "Big Poppa Pump" hasn't relied on his trusty Frankensteiner (left) too much in recent years, we know it's still there in his arsenal. He prefers a more power-based attack now (above). The Murph has a feeling that he will stick to that power-based attack in WWE, and he's not happy about it.

that, why is he not doing it? Not even in big pay-per-view matches? Why is he burying a talent he doubtlessly spent months to perfect? Is it because Paul Heyman asks him not to? Please. In the end, everyone answers to Vinnie Mac, and we all know it.

More than 15 months after the WCW "invasion," WCW's biggest star is finally appearing on WWE TV. He doesn't have to concern himself with carrying the flag for a dying promotion in a dead-end storyline. All he has to do is go out and be himself. If he does, Steiner could be the promotion's next breakout superstar.

The question is, will Vince McMahon let him?

Will McMahon put all his energy into promoting a wrestler who made his name in a rival promotion? Or will McMahon make an example of "Big Poppa Pump" and feed him to up-and-coming WWE talent to again show that WWE superstars were superior to WCW superstars all along?

If the past is any indication, I expect the latter. And that's a damn shame. I can't tell you how well Scott Steiner can execute the Frankensteiner, the breathtaking variation of the huracanrana that helped make the Steiner brothers the top tag team of the 1990s. The only people that know for sure are Steiner and his sparring partners. But I'd be willing to bet we won't see Steiner doing a Frankensteiner on WWE TV. Why? Steiner undoubtedly cost McMahon a pretty penny.

Vince has his stockholders to answer to. Vince doesn't want to see Steiner injure himself executing a Frankensteiner, just like he doesn't want to see Lesnar injure himself with a shooting star press.

That means—despite the incredible credentials of Steiner and Lesnar—the fans are likely to get a slower, power-based slugfest. A match between Steiner and Triple-H would be the same. Picture a classic confrontation between The Warlord and The Ultimate Warrior and that's what two potential Match of the Year candidates *could* become.

I sincerely hope I'm wrong. I hope Steiner debuts with the Smackdown brand and demands shots at Lesnar's title. I hope Angle, Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, and Rey Misterio Jr. line up and get in his way. I hope Steiner goes nose-to-nose with each Smackdown competitor, gradually revealing more and more of his offensive weapons against each opponent. I hope, at No Way Out 2003, Steiner hits a tilt-a-whirl suplex on The Big Show and heads into WrestleMania looking like an unstoppable machine. I hope Lesnar the unstoppable machine vs. Steiner the unstoppable machine is a match for the ages.

But over the past two years, WWE has done a lot to lower my hopes and expectations. The once-in-a-lifetime WWE-WCW feud was a joke. The Intercontinental title that was coveted by some of the greatest names in this history of this business was eliminated with precious little fanfare. Eric Bischoff debuts on WWE TV, and the biggest storyline he can pull off is HLA.

Steiner has what it takes to be a top draw in WWE. He's a great character and a great in-ring talent. He's a bona fide superstar.

And I'm afraid he's going to go to waste in WWE. Just like his old NWO compatriots.

You read it here first. □

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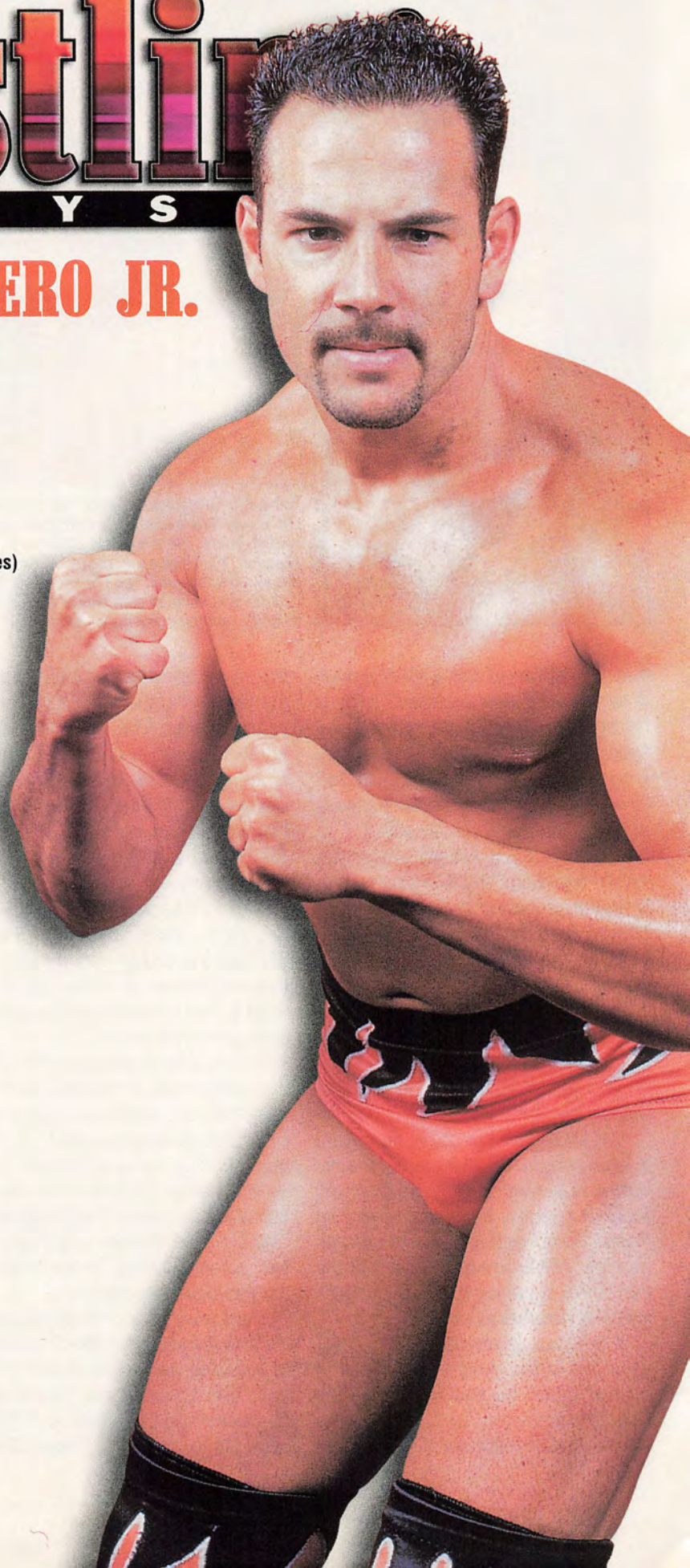
THE Wrestlin ANALYS

CHAVO GUERRERO JR.

Years Pro: 8
Size: 5'9", 185
"*PWI* 500" Listings: 2002—115
2001—42
2000—98
1999—105
1998—64
1997—139
Titles: WCW cruiserweight (2 times)
PWI Awards: None



Offense (9.0): This Guerrero's offense is generally only as good as his opponent. He thrives on the cat-and-mouse game of matching opponents move-for-move. That's why he surprised a lot of fans by keeping pace with Rey Misterio Jr. when the masked Luchador debuted for the Smackdown brand. He should dust off some of Grandpa Gory's old moves to really amaze people.

Defense (8.5): As a fan favorite in WCW, Guerrero often took beatings without fighting back very valiantly. Guerrero has been a heel ever since his WWE debut and, as he was during the last days of WCW, is now adept at stalling, rolling to the arena floor to halt a foe's momentum, and grabbing the ropes to break a hold. It's all in the playbook, so it's legitimate defense.

Experience (9.0): He executed his first suplex in his playpen. The tornado DDT came later—otherwise he would have spent a lot of time in the pediatric ward. With grandfather Gory, father Chavo Sr., and uncles Mando, Hector, and Eddie around, Chavo Jr. would have found it hard *not* to become a talented wrestler. He needs main-event experience, though.

Conditioning (8.0): His physique has deteriorated just a bit since his initial days in WCW. Being relegated to the lower tier at house shows and becoming a *Tough Enough* trainer didn't provide him with great incentive to remain in peak condition. He should train with Eddie more often. For now, a slight amount of flab is fine—just so it doesn't get jiggly.

Science (9.5): Nearly all Luchadors regard Gory Guerrero as a legend not for his speed, but for his mat grappling skills. Chavo is suppressing some of those same skills for the sake of faster-paced matches on Smackdown shows. Chavo is an excellent grappler, which he proved as a trainer on *Tough Enough.* Maybe we'll see more of that when he's a PPV player.

Stamina (8.0): Most of Guerrero's career has played out during the Monday night era, when wrestlers are often forced to squeeze their matches into four to six minutes. It's also worth noting that he does not have much experience in Japan's brand of marathon matches, as Eddie Guerrero and Chris Benoit do. It's not that he is a poor athlete; he just isn't used to that pace.

Power (8.0): Chavo's strength deficiency became noticeable recently when he began teaming with Eddie against heavyweights such as Edge and Rikishi. But he can overpower cruiserweights such as Rey Misterio Jr. and even champion Jamie Noble. Billy Kidman is the only WWE cruiserweight who is noticeably stronger than Guerrero.

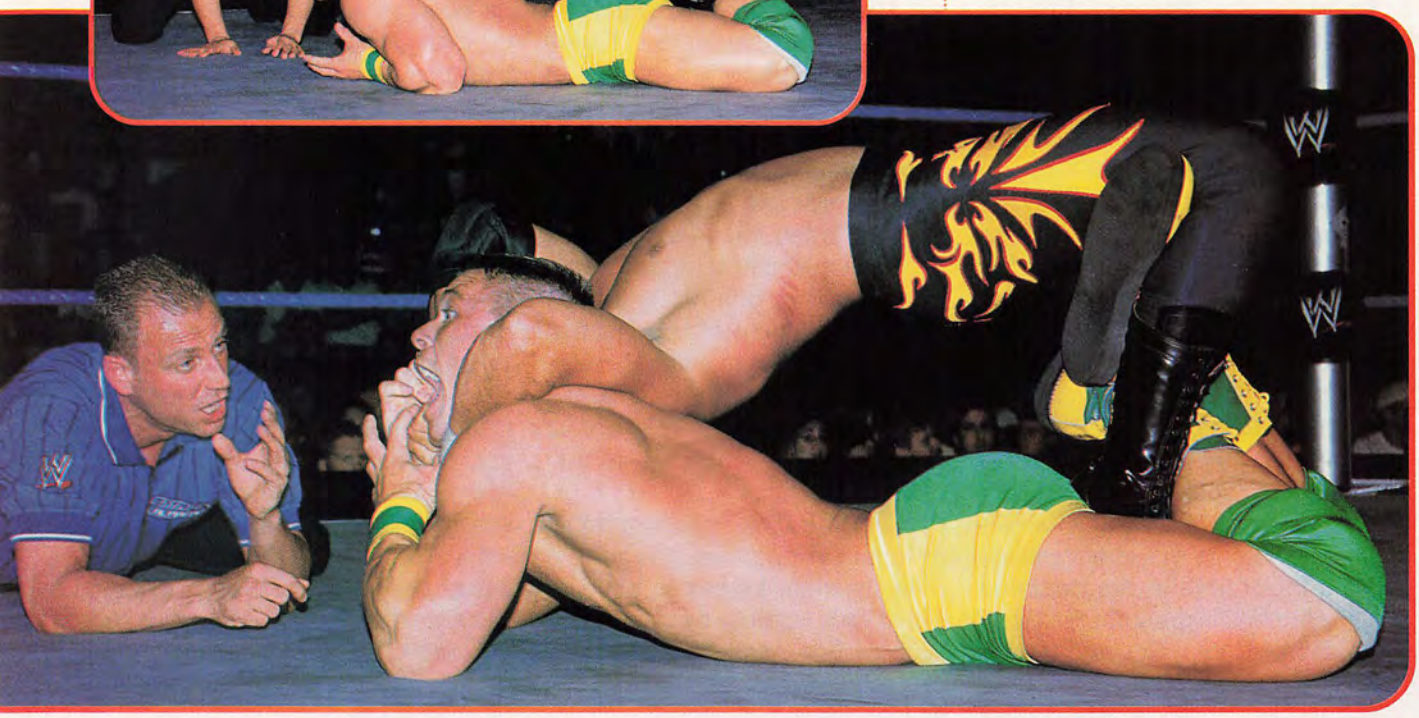
Speed (9.0): Guerrero has slowed a bit compared to younger Smackdown cruiserweights. Who can fly like Misterio, anyway? This isn't a major negative for Guerrero, because he has always relied more on leverage and gravity for most of his maneuvers. He's the king of the back bodydrop.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (7.0): That tapping sound you hear might be Chavo Guerrero Jr. signaling the end of his match. He often submitted in his early WCW matches, but everyone conceded that he was an up-and-comer. Now it's excusable because he's a heel. When is he going to toughen up?

Quality Of Opposition (9.0): Guerrero's Smackdown foes are on par with the opposition he faced in WCW. While the WCW cruiserweight division was more diverse, with a number of Mexican and Japanese stars, Smackdown's heavyweight mid-card is superior to the old WCW's. Facing tough opponents is okay. Beating them would be much better.

① **Like most Luchadors, Chavo Guerrero Jr. has some pretty spectacular moves in his arsenal, but he realizes how important it is to be a strong mat grappler and to be able to use the simplest of holds to wear opponents down. He's solid, not flashy.**

② Chavo can be rather creative when he has an opponent in a vulnerable position on the mat. Just when it looks he's setting up just a basic leglock, he might bridge over his opponent and apply what looks like a variation of the Crippler crossface.



③ If Guerrero can stay in the Smackdown mix with key players such as Kurt Angle (and Edge and Chris Benoit), he should gain confidence and become a much better wrestler. He needs to face the best and get stars like Angle to challenge and push him.

④ **John Cena must have learned a few things about what it takes to be a good mat-based technical wrestler when he took on Chavo. What Guerrero lacks in size and strength, he makes up for with speed, experience, and cunning. His family taught and trained him well.**

THE ANALYSIS

Repertoire: Guerrero can adapt to any opponent, which is why WWE trusted him to wrestle the debuting Rey Misterio Jr. on *Smackdown.* While the Lucha Libre style could burn him out quickly, Guerrero's executions of the huracanrana, flying headscissors, and Asai moonsault are nearly flawless. Snapmares and backslides are staples of his matches. His tornado DDT, his finishing maneuver for more than five years, has withstood the test of time.

Strengths: It's difficult to overemphasize the importance of Guerrero's wrestling roots. In the Guerrero family, wrestling is what men are born to do. He is the industry's most accomplished third-generation star, next to The Rock. But Guerrero had a larger, more tight-knit family, which immersed young Chavo into the business even more. Guerrero hasn't yet come close to fulfilling his potential, considering that he's such a natural.

Weaknesses: Remember when he tried to lure Eddie into an Elmer Fudd-style box trap? Remember his stick horse named Pepe? Or when he lost a hair vs. hair match to Eddie, and eagerly shaved his own head? Doing his version of the stinkface is his current bad shtick. Even if Chavo isn't to blame for these silly gimmicks and angles, he shouldn't look as if he's having so much fun doing them. He should be condemned for that.

Defining Career Moment: While in WCW, Chavo had been forced into being Eddie's apprentice due to a prematch stipulation. Eddie gave him worthless advice for several weeks, and Chavo finally got a chance to wrestle his uncle for his freedom. Chavo defeated Eddie on June 14, 1998, at The Great American Bash. The rest of the Guerrero family, who had tired of Eddie's arrogance, rejoiced in Chavo Jr.'s victory.

Future: Guerrero's future has never appeared brighter than it is now. By becoming Eddie's regular partner on Smackdown cards, Chavo should grow accustomed to being in the ring with Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, Rey Misterio Jr., and Edge. That will improve the fans' perception of him. Teaming with Eddie to beat Angle and Benoit for the WWE Smackdown tag team title would be Chavo's greatest achievement ever.

Okay, you see and read interviews with the big stars all the time (even in this very magazine). What we're offering here is a quick Q & A with someone who hasn't quite made it really big yet. These are 12 questions you'd probably never think to ask anyone!

12 questions

LOW-KI

What is the most disgusting item you've ever seen on a menu?

I've tried cow tongue. If it's thin, it's okay. If it's cut thick, it tastes like ham.

What's the most embarrassing thing you've ever done in public, but, fortunately, no one noticed?

I'm not really risky out in public. The most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me was when my pants ripped open during a tag team match in Midwest Championship Wrestling in Chicago. It was me and Jayson Reign vs. Joey Matthews and Christian York. My gear got wet beforehand, and I had left my athletic supporter at home. I put my gear on with nothing underneath. During the match, Joey attacked me, and when I hit the mat, I felt a nice breeze, and I knew where it was coming from. I quickly locked my legs as the ref said, "Hey, your pants just ripped open." I wrestled 10 to 15 minutes with things hanging out. No one really noticed except for Joey and Christian.

Why don't you have any hair?

I'm not a fan of hair. Not interested in it. And I'm lazy, so I'm not one for standing in front of a mirror and primping.

Who is the one wrestler or celebrity who makes you say, "How the hell did you get so popular?" every time you see him?

Socko. A sock got over in the WWF. It still bugs me that Mick Foley was able to do that.

Which would be worse and why, wrestling Bruce in an evening gown match for the Miss TNA title, or wearing a coconut bra and hula skirt in public?

I think the hula skirt would be worse.

If you could wrestle one match in any federation, past or present, which would it be and why?

Me against Dynamite Kid in his prime, in New Japan at the time when he had his series against Tiger Mask. Zero-One has given me his nickname, and they see me as a new generation Dynamite Kid.

You have a choice between Anna Nicole Smith, Pee Wee Herman, and Jim Hellwig to live with on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Which would you choose and why?

I'll go with Anna Nicole just because I was a big fan of her assets when I was growing up.

What country would you most like to visit and why?

I've already been to Japan, but I would love to keep going back there as long as I can. I'd also like to go to India, but I don't know why. I'd like to visit the Taj Mahal.

How did the name Low-Ki originate?

It came from the rap song "No Diggity" by Blackstreet. The lyric by the guy says, "Very low-key on the profile ..." and that fit me perfectly when I heard it.

***Do* you have a personality?**

I don't think so. I'm just stupid.

What is the one thing you wish your wrestling trainer told you when you were learning your craft?

You really can't get in trouble for hitting someone hard. You learn as you go along.

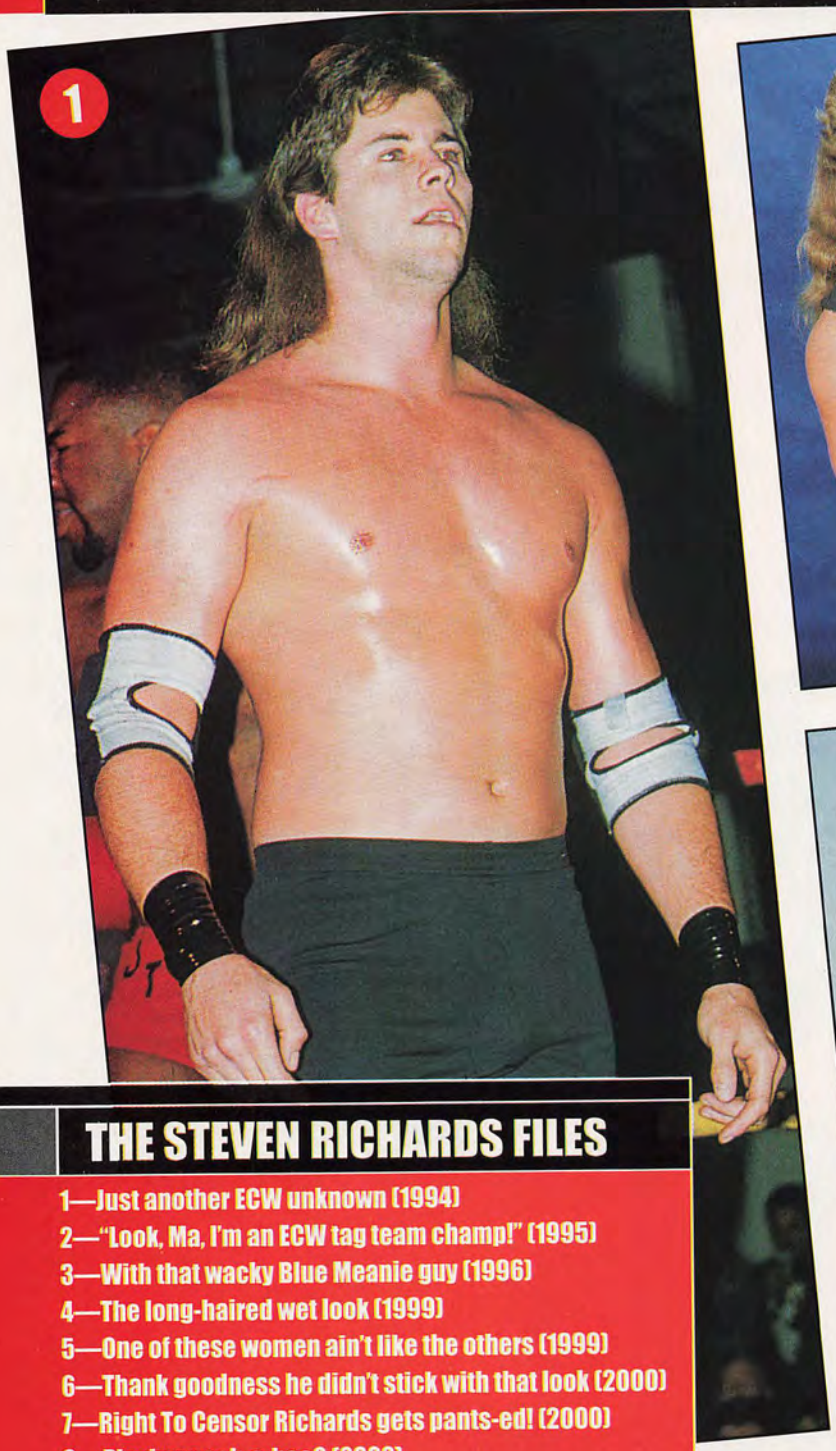
You have a hammer, midget, and a roulette wheel. What are your plans for the evening?

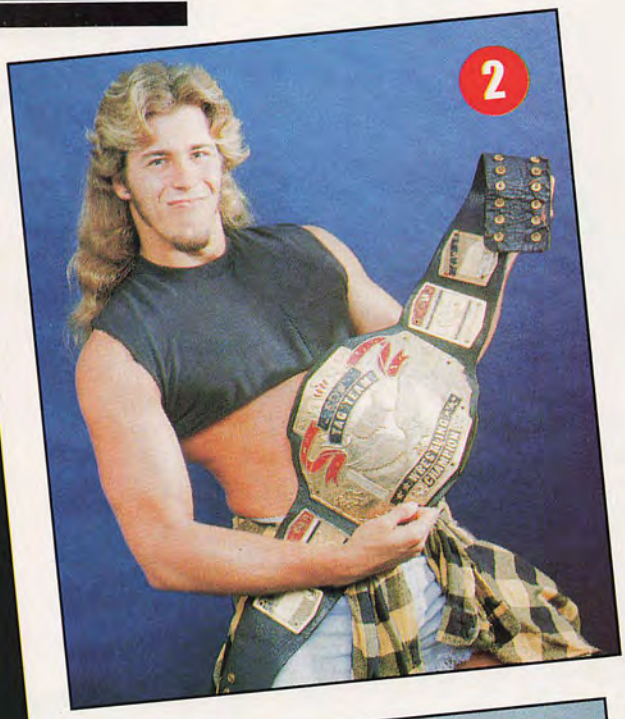
I'm pretty sure I'd use the hammer to hook the roulette wheel up to have midget stuff at each stop. You know, like how many midgets fit in an oven? Midget tossing. Stuff like that, but nothing too freaky. □

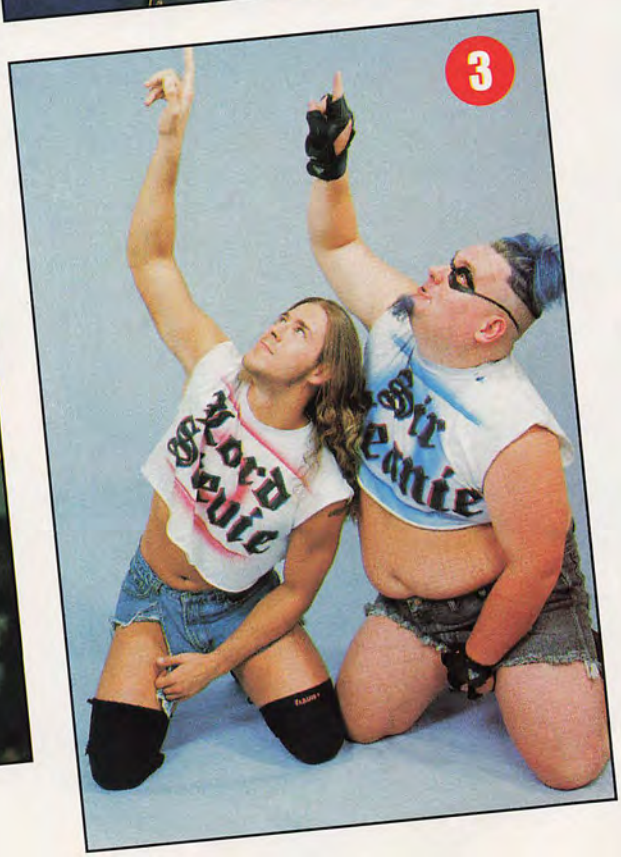
ROH
RING OF HONOR
we don't imitate...we innovate

It's amazing how drastically certain superstars change their looks over the years. A change in hair color or hairstyle here, a new ring outfit there, a few more tattoos here and there, or the mother of all changes ... the total gimmick overhaul. Every month, *PWI* will show you just how much one of your favorites has transformed himself. Yeah, it really is the same person in all these photos!

through the years

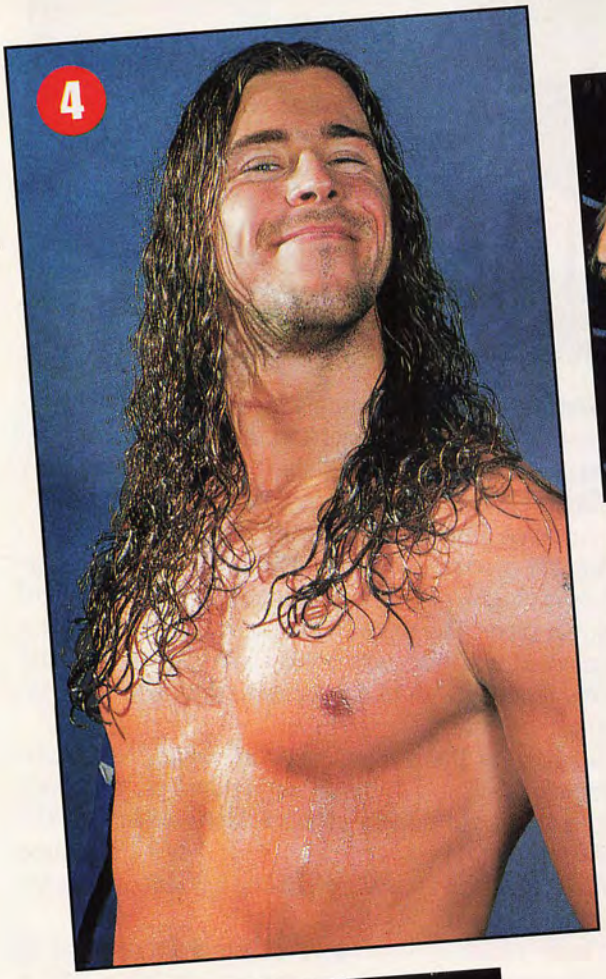






THE STEVEN RICHARDS FILES

1—Just another ECW unknown (1994)
2—"Look, Ma, I'm an ECW tag team champ!" (1995)
3—With that wacky Blue Meanie guy (1996)
4—The long-haired wet look (1999)
5—One of these women ain't like the others (1999)
6—Thank goodness he didn't stick with that look (2000)
7—Right To Censor Richards gets pants-ed! (2000)
8—Playing peek-a-boo? (2002)



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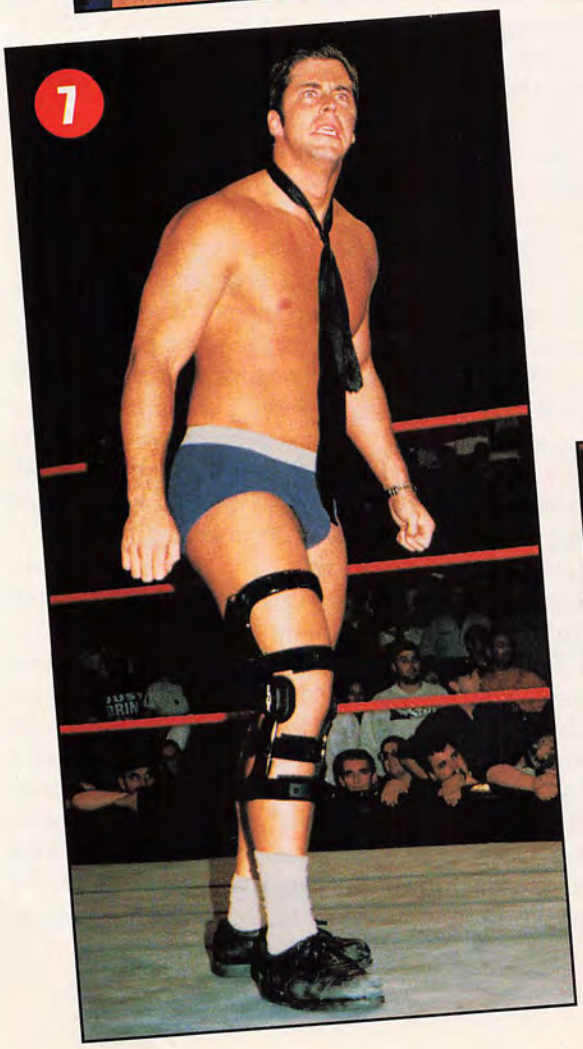

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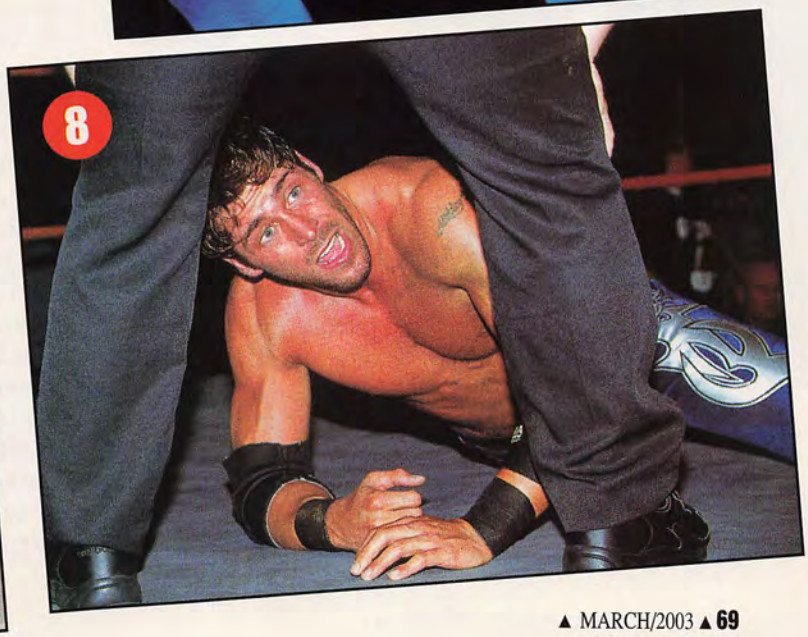


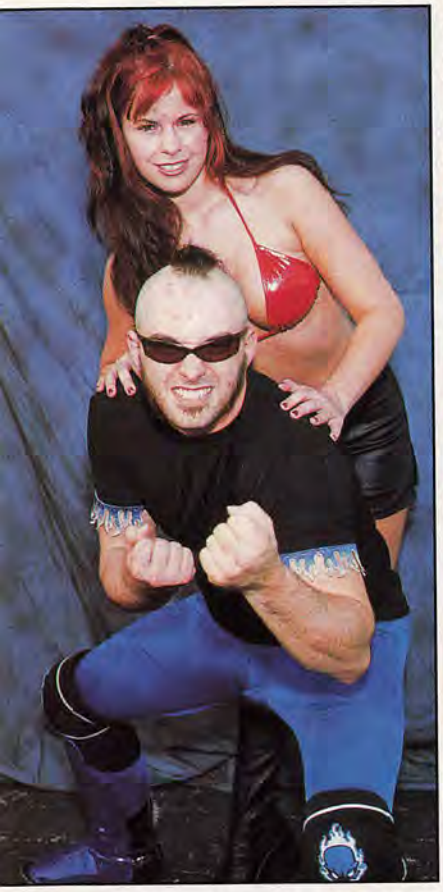
8

independent roundup

By Liz Hunter

WE'VE BEEN ASKED repeatedly by fans, wrestlers, and promotions to increase our coverage of independent wrestling. There are often just too many newsworthy happenings in WWE, NWA-TNA, and the wrestling world in general to fit everything into "Ringside." With that in mind, we decided to give you an additional news column—devoted entirely to the independent scene. Most of the information will be culled from the mountains of news items we receive each month for "Arena Reports."

The NWA held its 54th anniversary show in Corpus Christi, Texas, on October 26. This year's festivities were made more interesting by the addition of NWA-TNA stars to the mix of wrestlers representing more than a dozen NWA affiliates. The NWA-TNA guys fared well in this intrapromotional showcase, with **Jorge Estrada** winning the NWA North American title from NWA East's **Paul Atlas**. Other highlights included the following: **Ryan Pisiak** won a hair vs. hair match against **Dagon Briggs**. After the bout, Pisiak started to shave Briggs' mohawk, but Briggs' valet, **Seven** (no, not the male Seven from OVW), made the save ... NWA junior heavyweight champion **Jason Rumble** (NWA New England) retained the title against **Rocky Reynolds** (NWA Tri-State), only to be attacked by **A.J. Styles** after the bout ... Texas native **Steve DeMarco** (NWA Southwest) defeated **J.P. Black** (NWA Southwest) to win the Texas title in a taped-fist Texas death match. For complete results, turn to page 76 and check out "Arena Reports." Also at the convention, the NWA elected its new board of directors, choosing **Richard Arpin** of NWA Tri-State as the new president and **Fredric G. Rubenstein** of NWA Over The Top as VP.



Dagon Briggs is very serious about keeping that hair of his, so much so that his valet, Seven, stopped Ryan Pisiak from shaving it off after Pisiak beat him in a hair vs. hair match at the NWA's 54th anniversary show.

With the modest success of NWA-TNA's weekly pay-per-views, the NWA might just be able to regain some of its former glory. The anniversary show proved that there are talented wrestlers within the NWA network. Maybe it's now time for TNA to start showcasing more of them on its pay-per-views.

Staying on the subject of NWA news, NWA UK-Hammerlock's **Paul Vault** will be featured on the "Body Beautiful" special edition of the British version of *The Weakest Link*. Host **Anne Robinson** will be testing Paul's world-class mental skills along with the wit of several other beautiful Brits.

Cheerleader Melissa made a triumphant return to All Pro Wrestling recently, saving the popular **Nikki** from a beating at the hands of **James Watkins**. Watkins refused to release Nikki from a camel clutch after a recent match. While the fans chanted for **Robert Thompson** to make the save, Melissa surprised everyone by storming through the APW garage door and nailing Watkins with a missile dropkick. Melissa had spent the summer with Arsion in Japan and is glad to be back on American soil.

One of the most controversial wrestlers from Combat Zone Wrestling, **W-Beater**, is retiring. Unfortunately, this man's full wrestling name hasn't graced the pages of any London Publishing magazine because we have deemed it to be in poor taste. Let's just say that his name is too close to what **Steve Austin** has been accused of doing to **Debra** for our liking. Missing letters aside, we hope Mr. Beater finds a more productive use for his weed whacker now that he won't be using it on opponents in the ring.

In other retirement news, **The Sandman** has announced that he's retiring from active competition. Sandman made the announcement on Xtreme Pro Wrestling's syndicated TV show recently and claims that he must retire for the sake of his family and his body. "Traveling sucks, and I don't get to see my kids much," said Sandman. "I loved ECW because I could be at home a lot. I had my chance to live my dream of being a wrestler. I don't need to do this anymore." Sandman's last match was scheduled to take place on November 16. Whether he will remain in retirement remains to be seen. Maybe we should ask **Terry Funk** for his thoughts on that issue.

Top Rope Championship Wrestling ceased operations at the end of October after almost three years in existence. The Canadian independent had featured some of North America's best new indy talent, and veteran wrestlers like **Tatanka**, **Jim Neidhart**, and **Davey Boy Smith**.

IPW Hardcore Wrestling's **Mike** and **Todd Shane**, along with their manager, **"Hardcore Giant" Ron Niemi**, have joined **Ricky Santana's** Millennium Wrestling Council in Puerto Rico in its war against **Carlos Colon's** family. The twins and their manager are now feuding with **The Reggatones**, formerly **The Headhunters**.

In a bizarre move, Ring of Honor has formed a loose alliance with Combat Zone Wrestling to combat the Philadelphia infiltration of Xtreme Pro Wrestling. These three promotions, as well as several others, are battling for supremacy in this region of the country, as well as the famed Viking Hall, formerly known as the ECW Arena. While local promotions like ROH and CZW have been playing a game of king of the hill, West Coast-based XPW has marched right in and taken control of Viking Hall, *er*, the XPW Arena. ROH holds its shows about five blocks away from Viking Hall in the Murphy Rec Center, but XPW made a pre-emptive strike by running at Viking Hall on the same night that ROH ran in its home arena. Sounds confusing, right? It's very confusing for Philadelphia independent wrestling fans.

Quick title changes: Ultimate Wrestling Federation, October 25: **Rush** beat heavyweight champion **Butcher** ... **Kid U.S.A.** beat junior heavyweight champion **Brady A. Desire** ... **One** beat **Reggie** for the hardcore title ... ***World of Hurt Wrestling, October 25:*** **Bert Williams** defeated heavyweight champion **H.C. Loc** ... **Jeff Starr** defeated U.S. champ **Ricky Dominguez** ... **The Outcast Killas** defeated tag champs **Moondogs Mutt** and **Mange** ... **Danger** defeated heavyweight champ **Bert Williams** after tying him up with duct tape and crashing him through a table ... ***American Championship Wrestling, October 12:*** **Samir** and **Joey Corman** beat tag team champions **Pendragon** and **Blake the Brawler** ... **Joey Titan** won the heavyweight title in a four-way match also involving **Hot Shot Cassidy**, **Jeremy Young**, and **Ronnie Rose** ... ***Midwest Powerhouse Wrestling, October 19:*** **Dan "The Beast" Severn** beat heavyweight champion **The Searcher** by submission ... ***NWA Wildside, October 19:*** **Slim J** beat junior heavyweight champion **Jeremy Lopez** ... ***3PW, October 19:*** **Sabu** (managed by **Tod Gordon**) pinned heavyweight champion **Gary Wolfe** ... ***IPW Hardcore Wrestling, October 11:*** **Frankie Capone** won the TV title in a three-way match over former champ **Rod Steel** and **Jet Jaguar** ... IPW tag team champions **Scoot Andrews** and **Mike Sullivan** defeated NWA Florida tag champs **The Shane Twins** to once again unify those two tag team titles in Florida ... ***Texas Championship Wrestling, October 4:*** **Krusher Kong** pinned heavyweight champion **Gary Tool** ... ***Oklahoma Championship Wrestling, October 5:*** **Butch Dalton** beat TV champ **Rocco Valentino** ... ***Galaxie Pro Wrestling, October 12:*** **Ironhead** defeated heavyweight champion **Dave Holiday** ... **David Raines** and **Scott Bullwinkle** defeated **Extreme Phenom** and **Dirty Don** to win the vacant tag title ... ***NWA East, October 12:*** **Scottie Gash** defeated brass knuckles champ **Sean Stylez** ... **Crusher Hansen** defeated heavyweight champion **Dirk Ciglar** ... ***Premier Wrestling Federation, October 13:*** **C.W. Anderson** and **Steve Corino** beat universal tag team champs **Joel** and **Jose Maximo** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Rockin' Rebel** beat universal champion **Chris Hamrick**. □

Who knew that Gary Wolfe, formerly one-half of The Pit Bulls, was such an advocate of good sportsmanship? He actually raised Sabu's hand after Sabu beat him for the 3PW heavyweight title in Philadelphia.

the international report

By Mike Spillane

WCW MONDAY NITRO left us with many memories and images from its five-year-plus run, some pleasant, some not so pleasant. By the time *Nitro's* ratings peaked, the show featured a plethora of fine international talent. **Rey Misterio Jr.**, **Jushin Liger**, **La Parka**, **The Great Muta**, **Konnan**, **Yu-ji Nagata**—the list of stars from other countries who had gotten little or no previous chance to be stars in the U.S. went on and on. One *Nitro* moment still sticks out very clearly in the minds of Lucha and *puroresu* fans, though, perhaps above all others. It was a fateful night in the fall of 1996 when **Ultimo Dragon**, top junior heavyweight of the WAR promotion, was shown on camera wearing the eight-championship J-Crown, gold and silver title belts hanging from every limb. If any one man could make a claim to being the best wrestler in the world at that time, Ultimo's impressive collection seemed to lend him a definitive credibility above all others.

Dragon had first popped up in WCW in late-summer, but when he next visited the United States, he was adorned in more championship belts than most fans had ever seen in one place at one time.

Although he lost the J-Crown a few months later to Liger at the Tokyo Dome, he managed to top his feat of holding eight championships simultaneously. Upon capturing the WCW cruiserweight title from Dean Malenko in December 1996, Ultimo's collection boasted nine belts from various junior heavyweight, welterweight, and light heavyweight classes. Dragon was a sensation everywhere he went, even after losing those titles in 1997, and became a staple of *Nitro* as the Monday night wars escalated.

A botched surgery to remove bone chips from his elbow forced Ultimo into early retirement. After leaving active competition, Dragon opened the Toryumon, a training facility and later an independent promotion that now runs shows in both Mexico and Japan. His proteges have won fans over in droves, to the point that merchandise sales, television ratings and attendance figures seem to indicate that the Toryumon has already become a major player on the international scene. Now, after years of inactivity, a restorative surgery has given Ultimo Dragon full use of his arm once again, and the former J-Crown champion is on the comeback trail.

For his first match back, Ultimo faced **Masaaki Mochizuki**, a tough mat wrestler with a tremendous background in the martial arts. After absorbing some damage to his previously damaged arm, Ultimo was in considerable pain, and the official stopped the match just a few minutes after it began. Dragon was not overly concerned, however. No stumbling blocks will keep him from returning to full-time active duty, and he plans on visiting some of his favorite wrestling cities, including Mexico City and Los Angeles, on his comeback tour.

The legend of Ultimo Dragon has not diminished much since his forced early retirement, and his return to action brought immediate interest from perhaps the least likely of all major promotions—WWE. In the past,

While Bill Goldberg's return to wrestling in All-Japan continues to make big headlines in the Far East, a man he considers one of his best friends in the business, Ultimo Dragon, is also on the comeback trail after being forced into retirement due to injury. What has surprised a lot of people is that WWE has shown interest in signing Dragon.

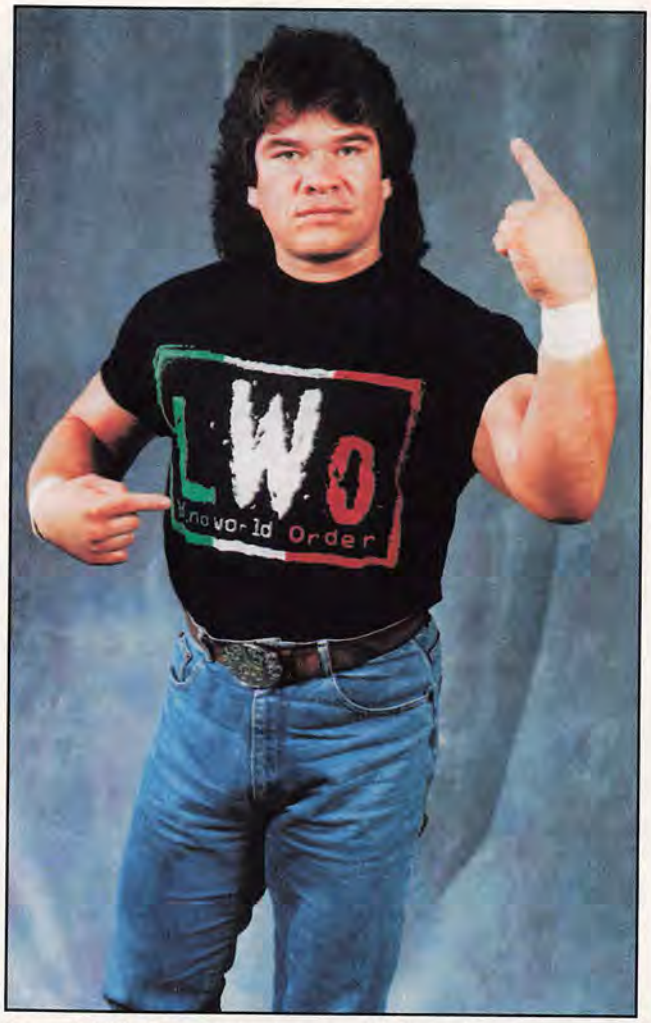
WWE signed top international name cruiserweight talents (**Taka Michinoku**, **Essa Rios**, and **Dick Togo**, for example), only to squander them in undercard comedy roles. Perhaps in light of the warm response cruiserweights such as **Tajiri** and Misterio have received, WWE is willing to take a chance on another international phenom. Many of Ultimo's past rivals are on the WWE roster (**Chris Jericho**, **William Regal**, **Lance Storm**, and **Eddie Guerrero**, to name just a few), while one of his greatest opponents, **Dean Malenko**, now works as an agent for the company. The future of the Toryumon will be uncertain should Ultimo sign with the WWE, but for now, no deals are on the table, and the talks have only just begun.

Another *Nitro* alumnus made headlines recently, but for **El Dandy**, the Mexican periodicals proved less than kind to him. The culmination of his most heated feud in a long time was broadcast via pay-per-view from Nuacalpan to a national audience in the fall. Pay-per-view is a medium usually dominated by EMLL in Mexico, but this time it was rival promotion AAA that took the plunge. Although no stranger to pay-per-view, AAA doesn't maintain a regular schedule of events like we have here in the United States, where a PPV is offered every month. A packed house at El Toreo saw El Dandy lose to **Perro Aguayo Jr.** in the evening's main event, with the stipulation that the loser be shaved bald. The media turned out in force for this event, and practically every Mexican periodical that covers Lucha Libre ran photos of the newly shaved El Dandy with his less-than-flattering haircut.

Who is **Bob Sapp**? That depends on where *puroresu* is heading in these next few months. Some people would have you believe Bob Sapp is going to turn the wrestling world on its ear the same way **Antonio Inoki** did when he fought **Muhammad Ali** back in 1976 (in what some claim was the first mixed martial arts match). Others liken him to the 2002 version of **Tank Abbott**.

Regardless, Sapp is a fighter for K-1, a mixed martial arts company run by promoter **Kazuyoshi Ishii**, but his meteoric rise to stardom in K-1 is now spilling over into pro wrestling, as Ishii has been negotiating bouts for Sapp with New Japan, All-Japan, and practically every other *puroresu* promotion with television programming. In any pursuit, Sapp is a giant, standing 6'7" and weighing close to 400 pounds. He's dispatched some of the best fighters in the world in short order, often absorbing incredible amounts of punishment without ever backing down.

Sapp made his pro wrestling debut in the semi-main event of New Japan's 30th anniversary show at the Tokyo Dome this fall. The fanfare surrounding his first match catapulted him to a lofty position on the card, and to add to the fervor, he aligned himself with Inoki against **Manabu Nakanishi** in what many felt was the hottest attraction of the event. Nakanishi was ill-prepared for the size and power of Sapp, and even though the bout ended in a countout loss for Nakanishi, it was the only one of 15 bouts on the card to electrify the audience. A mismatch between **Masa Chono** and **Joanie Laurer**, and the IWGP heavyweight title match between **Yuji Nagata** and **Kazuyuki Fujita** elicited only half-hearted receptions from the crowd.



Fans of Eddie Guerrero's old Latino World Order in WCW might be interested to hear that one of the proud members of the group, El Dandy, recently lost his long locks in a big showdown with Perro Aguayo Jr. in Mexico.

It's doubtful that Sapp will ever be counted among the best wrestlers in the world, but that certainly never stopped men like **Bill Goldberg** or **Steve Austin** from making gigantic impacts on the sport. The strange predicament that could be created if Sapp continues his climb toward superstardom is that *puroresu's* most sought-after competitor would be an athlete from a different sport (fighting, not wrestling). Despite a long list of failed experiments along this line, it seems that Inoki will continue to try to find a happy medium between wrestling and mixed martial arts until he creates a new category of star that can jump between both genres easily.

With every new height that Sapp's star climbs to, the power of men like Ishii and other fight promoters grows within the wrestling world. He might not do it all by himself, but Sapp's crossover success could radically change the face of wrestling in Japan and elsewhere within a short period of time. □

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Nov. 1996: The Steiners: Feasting On A Buffet Of Violence. Also: Shawn Michaels, Sabu-Douglas, King of Ring, Eddie Guerrero, truck stop terror.
Dec. 1996: Three Women For Four Horsemen? The Hot Search For A Fourth Filly Has Begun! Also: Sunny & Gunns, Giant, Goldust, Cornette & Hart, Jerry Jarrett.
Holiday 1996 (Special Issue): The Tombstone: Wresling's Deadliest Finisher. Also: 1997 calendar, "Pyscho" Sid, Benoit-Misterio, Steiners-NWO, Pit Bull I, Jushin Liger.
Feb. 1997: Trouble In Egoville: Is There An NWO Within The NWO? Also: Chris Candido, Bret-Shawn, Ric Flair, Joey Styles, Liger-Benoit.
June 1997: Ahmed Johnson Reveals: "I Almost Joined The Nation Of Domination." Also: Mankind, Lex Luger, NWO, Davey Boy Smith, Jerry Graham.
Oct. 1997 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: LOD-PG-13, Rob Van Dam, Flair & Horsemen, Ken Shamrock, McMichael-White, Madd & Mama Maxxine.
Nov. 1997: WWF War Zone: Interfederation Battles Rock The Sport! Also: Ahmed Johnson, Curt Hennig, *Nueva* World Order, Chris Candido, Dan Severn.
Dec. 1997: Losing Is Bull! Has Dennis Rodman Had It With Hulk Hogan? Also: Steve Austin, Jarrett & Debra, Harts, Funk-Francine, Chris Jericho.
Holiday 1997 (Special Issue): The Steiners' Million-Dollar Gamble! Also: 1998 calendar, Alex Wright, The Patriot, Sgt. Slaughter, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.
Jan. 1998: Our Holiday Wish List For The Stars (Sable). Also: Bret Hart, Rey Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Roddy Piper, Fritz Von Erich.
Feb. 1998: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For '98. Also: Brian Pillman, Sting, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Reckless Youth.
March 1998: Hart Transplant! The Truth Behind Bret's Defection To WCW. Also: Steve McMichael, Bam Bam Bigelow, Steve Austin, Disco Inferno.
April 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament. Also: Scott Hall, Marlena, Chris Benoit, Gunn & James, Sabu-Sandman.
May 1998: Is The WWF Screwing Another Hart? Also: Steve Austin, Dallas Page, Booker T, Larry Zbyszko, Al Snow.
June 1998: Exclusive! Steve Austin: The 10 Men Who Inspired His Toughness. Also: Dusty & Dustin, Perry Saturn, Mortis, Jeff Jarrett.
July 1998 (Special Issue): Top Stars Answer Your Personal Questions. Also: Jericho-Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Sunny, Scott Steiner, Christopher-Michinoku.
Aug. 1998: WrestleMania XIV: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Sunny, Curt Hennig, Dan Severn, Ultimo Dragon.
Sept. 1998: Power Surge! While The NWO Fiddles ... These Men Are Burning. Also: Sable, Ultimo-Guerrero, DeGeneration X-Owen, Rocky Maivia, Mad Russian-Rambo.
Oct. 1998 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Steve Austin, Taka Michinoku, Al Snow, Hollywood Hogan, Roddy Piper, Misawa-Kawada.
Nov. 1998: Austin vs. Goldberg: Who Would Win And Why. Also: Bret Hart, Dude Love, Junkyard Dog, Helmsley-Michaels, Ray-Booker.
Dec. 1998: DDP's Big Bang Theories: Cutting Loose On Life, Love, & The Ultimate Buzz. Also: Sable-Jackie, Mankind, Hogan-Horace, D-Lo, APW.
Holiday 1998 (Special Issue): Kane: Still Haunted By His Day Of Glory. Also: Eddie Guerrero, Stevie Ray, Val Venis, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards, bonus calendar.
Jan. 1999: Seasons Greetings With A Bang (DDP & Kimberly). Also: Severn-Shamrock, Konnan, Arn, Undertaker-Kane, Chris Jericho.
Feb. 1999: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For '99! Also: Hogan & Hart, D-Lo, Ken Shamrock, Slaughter-Snow.
March 1999: Estrange Situation! Insider Reveals: "Shane Still Resents His Father! Also: X-Pac, Hogan-Warrior, Jesse Ventura, Billy Kidman, Scott Norton.
April 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament. Also: Bossman-McMahon, Steiner & Bischoff, Hollywood Hogan, Wrath, Blue Meanie.
May 1999: Team Corporate's WrestleMania Scare! Mankind's Title Victory Could Have Spoiled Everything! Also: New Age Outlaws, Eddie Guerrero, Triple-H, Bill Goldberg.
June 1999: Still In-Vince-Ible! What Will It Take To Topple This Man? Also: Rey Misterio Jr., ECW, Triple-H, NWO, Blue Meanie.
July 1999 (Special Issue): Top Stars Answer Your Personal Questions. Also: Vince McMahon, Vincent, Eric Bischoff, Giant Baba.
Aug. 1999: WrestleMania XV: The *Real* Winners And Losers! Also: Vam Dam-Lynn, Saturn, Goldust, Steiner-Bagwell.
Sept. 1999: Shane, Come Back! Can Vince Survive Without His Son? Also: Bret Hart, Rick Rude, Ken Shamrock, Hogan-Flair-Page-Goldberg, Tajiri-Crazy.
Oct. 1999 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Mankind & Shamrock, Snow-Holly, Sting, Edge, Flair-Robinson, AIWF.
Nov. 1999: Crash At The Bash! Enter Sid, Viciously! Also: Undertaker-Austin, Acolytes, Master P, Debra, Justin Credible.
Dec. 1999: The Rock: What Makes You Love/Hate This Man? Also: Sting, Shane Douglas, Droz, Piper-Bagwell, Taz.
Holiday 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 Turnbuckle Turkey Awards. Also: Sting, Dogg-Gunn, Undertaker, Steve Corino, 2000 calendar.
Jan. 2000: Dreaming Of An Extreme Christmas (Tommy Dreamer & Francine). Also: Goldberg, Al Snow, Billy Gunn, Doring & Road Kill, cigar-chompers.
Feb. 2000: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For 2000! Also: Vince-Bulldog, Mike Awesome, Sid Vicious, Gorilla Monsoon.
March 2000: Kevin Nash & Scott Hall: Getting Inside The Outsiders' Heads. Also: Dudleys, Jerry Lynn, Vince-DX, Kimberly, Zero Gravity.
April 2000 (Special Issue): The Y2K Computer Tournament. Also: Jarrett-PTB, Christopher & Taylor, Lou E. Dangerously, Lawler-Fantastico.
May 2000: Hey, Scott, Watch Your Back! The NWO Is Setting You Up! Also: Hacksaw Duggan, Rikishi Phatu, Test, Mike Awesome.
June 2000: Chris Jericho's Deadliest Enemy: His Ego! Also: Tazz, Kidman-Torrie, Nash-Funk, Buff Bagwell, New Jack.
July 2000 (Special Issue): It's True! Kurt Angle Will Be Hotter Than The Rock In Six Months! Also: Elizabeth, Steve Blackman, Norman Smiley, Spike Dudley, personal questions.
Aug. 2000: WrestleMania 2000: The *Real* Winners & Losers! Also: Dustin-Funk, Eddie Guerrero, ECW extreme?, WCW analysis.
Sept. 2000: Those Damn Dudleys! Is There An Evil Act Fans Won't Cheer? Also: Billy Kidman, Taka Michinoku, Yoshihiro Tajiri, Jeff Jarrett.
Oct. 2000 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Kurt Angle, Malenko-Saturn, Lance Storm, Tori, Jumbo Tsuruta, ECW headliners.
Nov. 2000: When Will Triple-H Proclaim ... "I'm Sick Of Being A McMahon!" Also: Trish Stratus, Shane Douglas, Hulk Hogan, Kevin Nash, Yoshihiro Tajiri.
[FULL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH JANUARY 2001]
Jan. 2001: Olympic Games: What Kind Of Angle Has Curt Been Running? Also: Tazz-Lawler, Big Vito, Stacy Keibler, Chris Benoit, Kid Kash, Chyna.
March 2001: Who Knows The Rock's Role? Is He Ditching Wrestling For Hollywood? Also: Trish Stratus, Billy Gunn, Jarrett-Sting, C.W. Anderson, Booker T.
May 2001: The WrestleMania Tip Sheet: What You Must Know About The Event Of The Year! Also: Scott Steiner, Dudleys, Malenko & Lita, Shane Douglas, Raven.
Aug. 2001: Game Face! We Haven't Seen Hunter's Ugly Side ... But Just Wait! Also: WWF vs. WCW, Kurt Angle, Vince McMahon, Booker T, Hardys & Lita, Haas brothers, WCW babes.
Oct. 2001: Will Debra Ice Stone-Cold? Also: Vince vs. Shane, Chyna, William Regal, former Big Three stars.
Dec. 2001: The WWF-WCW Dream Matches We Really Want! Also: Tazz, Dudleys, Perry Saturn, Johnny Valentine, 100 WCW facts.
Feb. 2002: RVD: The Story You've Been Missing For 10 Years! Also: Hardys, Randy Orton, Shawn Stasiak, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.
April 2002: Feud Alert! The Lowdown On 2002's Hotest Showdowns! Also: Rikishi, Stacy Keibler, Shane Helms, 2001 report cards.
June 2002: Special Comeback Issue: Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Kevin Nash. Also: Chris Jericho, Howard Stern, hypothetical unification showdowns.
Aug. 2002: WrestleMania X8: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Hulk Hogan, Scott Steiner, Jamie Noble, Jarrett-Christopher, All-Japan.
Oct. 2002: Dark Side Be Damned! Undertaker's At His Best As Himself! Also: Ric Flair, Triple-H, Wahoo McDaniel, Goldberg, WWE-Hollywood.
Dec. 2002: The Impossible Dream, Part 2: Can Angle Win Another Olympic Gold? Also: Shane McMahon, PTC-WWE, Trish Stratus, Malice, next best things.

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Spotlight Card of the Month

PHILADELPHIA, PA—3PW at Viking Hall: Joey Matthews defeated **Josh Daniels ... Rob Eckos** beat **White Lotus ... Jason Knight** beat **Del Tsunami ... Roadkill** beat **Christian York ... Syxx-Pac** beat NWA heavyweight champion **Ron Killings** in a non-title match **... The Blue Meanie** & **Jasmin St. Claire** beat **Rockin' Rebel** & **Missy Hyatt ... Jerry Lawler** pinned **Curt Hennig ... Sabu** defeated heavyweight champion **Gary Wolfe** to win the title.
(10-19-02)
—"Spotlight" photos by Timothy A. Walker

UNITED STATES

ARIZONA

TUCSON—WWE at the Convention Center: **Sho Funaki** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... **Bill DeMott** & **Crash Holly** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Bull Buchanan** ... **John Cena** pinned **Albert** ... **Billy Kidman** & **Shannon Moore** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Tajiri** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Edge** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** pinned **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **The Big Valbowski** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **D-Von** & **Ron Simmons** ... **Rikishi** defeated **Kurt Angle**.
(10-07-02)
—Michael Mathews

ARKANSAS

LITTLE ROCK—WWE No Mercy pay-per-view at the Alltel Arena: Raw tag team champions **Christian** & **Chris Jericho** beat **Booker T** & **Goldust** when Jericho pinned Goldust ... **Torrie Wilson** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Ric Flair** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** pinned **Tajiri** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** pinned Intercontinental champion **Kane** to unify the titles ... **Kurt Angle** & **Chris Benoit** beat **Edge** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** in the finals of a tournament to crown the first Smackdown tag team champions when Angle forced Edge to tap out ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** pinned **Victoria** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **The Undertaker** in a "Hell In A Cell" match.
(10-20-02)
—Harry Burkett

TEXARKANA—WWE at the Four States Entertainment Center: **Al Snow** pinned **Redd Dogg** ... **Justin Credible**, **Jamal**, & **Rosie** beat **Johnny Stamboli**, **R.C. Haas**, & **Mark Jindrak** ... **Batista** pinned **Steven Richards** ... **The Hurricane** & **Spike Dudley** beat **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** ... Intercontinental champion **Kane** pinned **Test** ... **D-Lo Brown** defeated **Raven** ... **Trish Stratus** & **Jacquelyn** beat **Molly Holly** & **Victoria** (**Stacy Keibler** was the guest referee) ... Raw tag team champions **Christian** & **Chris Jericho** beat **Booker T** & **Goldust** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Ric Flair**.
(10-19-02)
—Will Welsh

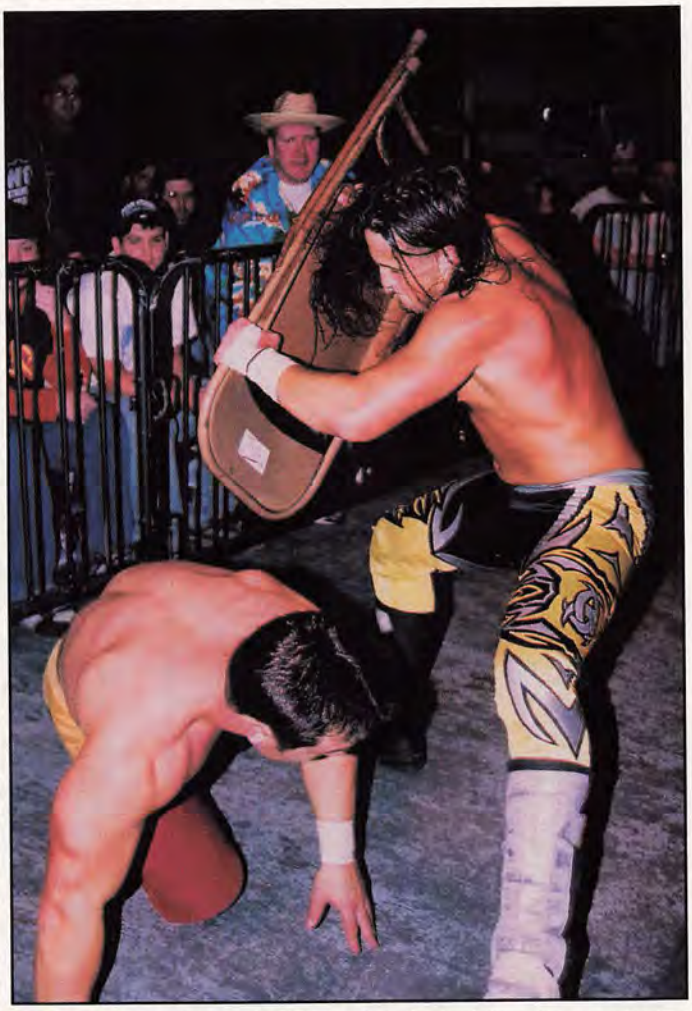
CALIFORNIA

HAYWARD—APW at the APW Garage: **Psycho Seth** beat **Jojo Fantastico** ... **James Watkins** beat **Vennis The Menace** ... **Larry Blackwell** & **Kafu** beat **Robert Thompson** & **Jardi Frantz** ... **Super Dragon** beat **Bobby Quance** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Nikki** & **Vic Grimes** beat **Melissa** & **Kryptonite**.
(10-25-02)
—Jeremy Medieros

SACRAMENTO—WWE at Arco Arena: **D-Lo Brown** pinned **Raven** ... **Justin Credible** & **Steven Richards** beat **Mark Jindrak** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Buh Buh Ray** & **Spike Dudley** beat **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** ... **Chris Jericho** beat **Jeff Hardy** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Goldust** ... Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Kane** defeated **Jamal** & **Rosie** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Rob Van Dam**.
(10-05-02)
—Ralph McCann

FLORIDA

ST. PETERSBURG—IPW Hardcore Wrestling at the Florida WrestlePlex: **Comic Book Guy Anderson** & **James Hendrix** beat **Jerrelle Clark** & **Steve Madison** ... **Cynic** won a three-way dance against **Kamikaze** and **Bolles Azulles** ... **Chaos** beat **Vito DeNucci** in a hardcore match ... **Axis** & **Python** beat **Pat Powers** & **Pat McGroin** ... **Billy Fives** pinned **Justice** ... **Hack Myers** & **Fidel Sierra** beat **Deathrow Jethrow** & **Prime Evil** ... **Mark Zout** beat **Rico Casanova** ... **Frankie Capone** won the IPW TV title in a three-way match against **Rod Steel** and **Jet Jaguar** ... Heavyweight champ **Agent Steele** beat **Don Montoya** by disqualification ... Florida unified cruiserweight champion **Naphtali** pinned **Reckless**



Joey Matthews ultimately defeated Josh Daniels using a spinning reverse DDT in the opener of the 3PW show, but in fine Viking Hall (ECW Arena) tradition, he got help from a steel chair along the way.

Youth ... IPW tag team champions **Scoot Andrews** & **Mike Sullivan** defeat **The Shane Twins** for the NWA FL tag titles unifying the tag team titles in Florida.
(10-11-02)

—Kyle Nibblet

GEORGIA

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NWA Arena: **Kid Kool** wrestled **Slim J** to a draw ... **Shadow Jackson** & **Crusier Lewis** beat **The Reverend** & **Dirt** ... **Jeff Lewis** beat **BAD** ... **The Lost Boys** beat **Blackout** and **Swingers, Inc** in a three-way tag team match... **Scott Cage** beat **Tony Stradlin**.
(10-25-02)

—Maria Berry

ROME—Squared Circle Wrestling Alliance at the Calhoun Avenue Sports Arena: **Iceburg** defeated **David Young** by disqualification ... **Jimmy Rave** beat **Ernest L. Bass** ... **The Beast** & **Time Bomb** wrestled **John** & **Kenny Arden** to a double-count-out ... **Frenchy Riviera** beat **Déjà Vu** ... **Michael Cross** & **Red** beat **Seth Cruise** & **Shane Williams**.
(10-25-02)

—Jim Pledger

TRION—Roughhouse Championship Wrestling at the RCW Arena: **Jonathan Lawrence** beat **Déjà Vu** ... **Billy Montana** defeated **Red** ... **Jacob Williams** beat **Dream** ... **John Arden** & **Billy Love** beat **Time Bomb** & **Lethal Injection** ... **Mark Pain** defeated **Tommy Roberts** in a hardcore match.
(10-19-02)

—Jennifer Duran

IDAHO

BOISE—WWE at the Bank of America Center: **Rico** pinned **Spike Dudley** ... **D-Lo Brown**, **Mark Jindrak**, & **Johnny Stamboli** defeated **Justin Credible**, **Raven**, & **Steven Richards** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Goldust** ... Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Kane** beat **Jamal** & **Rosie** ... **Test** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** & **Jeff Hardy** beat **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** ... **Torrie Wilson** defeated **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match ... Raw champion **Triple-H** pinned **Rob Van Dam**.
(10-04-02)

—Kathy Elliott

INDIANA

GREENSBURG—Wild Championship Wrestling Outlaws at the Parks Center: **Indiana Kidd Jr.** won a battle royal ... **Billy Bart** beat **Rob Ramer** ... **Q-Ball** pinned **Drucilla Davie** ... WCWO champion **Billy Roc** beat **Spider-dude** ... **Don Basher** & **Hoss** beat **Tiny the Mountaineer** & **Mr. Cool** ... **Uncle Ernie** and **Indiana Kidd Jr.** beat tag team champions **Itch Coma Weider** & **Shiloh Hunter** by disqualification.
(10-19-02)

—Randy Klemme

SOUTH BEND—IAW at the Cove: **Cousin Bubba** pinned **The Ripper** ... **Bobo Brazil Jr.** pinned **Johnny Hunter** ... TV champ **Kurt Beyer** pinned **Nasty Nick** ... **Demolition Ax** beat **J.J. Hunter** ... **Jimmy Snuka** beat **Andy Chene** ... Heavyweight champ **Brian Costello** pinned **King Kong Bundy**.
(10-12-02)

—Larry LaCluyse

KANSAS

WICHITA—WWE at the Kansas Coliseum: **Mark Jindrak** & **Johnny Stamboli** beat **Justin Credible** & **Steven Richards** ... **Tommy Dreamer** pinned **Rico** ... **Batista** pinned **Redd Dogg** ... Raw tag team champions **Christian** & **Chris Jericho** beat **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** & **Jeff Hardy** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Test** ... **Molly Holly** & **Victoria** defeated **Trish Stratus** & **Jacquelyn** ... **D-Lo Brown** pinned **Raven** ... **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** beat **Spike Dudley** & **The Hurricane** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Kane** by disqualification.
(10-26-02)

—Fran Landers

TOPEKA—WWE at Landon Arena: **Justin Credible** & **Steven Richards** beat **Mark Jindrak** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Batista** beat **Redd Dogg** ... **Rico** beat **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Spike Dudley** & **The Hurricane** beat **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Kane** by disqualification ... **D-Lo Brown** defeated **Raven** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** beat **Molly Holly** ... Raw tag team champions **Christian** & **Chris Jericho** beat **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** & **Jeff Hardy** ... **Rob Van Dam** beat **Test**.
(10-25-02)

—Marie Brown

KENTUCKY

LOUISVILLE—Ohio Valley Wrestling TV taping at the Davis Arena: ... **Matt Morgan** pinned **Lance Cade** ... **Badd Dogg** beat **Mark Jindrak** ... **Johnny Jeter** & **Mark Magnus** defeated **Orlando Jordan** & **Johnny Spade** ... **Nick Dinsmore** pinned **Rob Conway** in a "run for the rumble" match ... **B.J. Payne** defeated **Seven** by disqualification.
(10-16-02)

—Aaron Wilson

OWINGSVILLE—HCW Championship Wrestling at Bath County Middle School: **Alex Walker** beat **Scrapp Dogg** & **I.M. Smooth** in a three-way lumberjack match to capture the cruiserweight title ... **The Chosen One** beat **Mike Harris** ... **Ric** & **Mike Gunner** wrestled to a double-disqualification with **The Southside Wrecking Crew** ... **Stan Sierra** defeated **Stevie Phillips** ... Heavyweight champion **Shawn Christopher** defeated **Ric Gunner**.
(10-05-02)

—Darrell Fugate

MAINE

SOUTH PORTLAND—Maine Event Wrestling at the Portland Expo Building: **Chi Chi Cruz** beat **Mike Preston** by disqualification ... **Don Montoya** beat **Johnny Curtis** ... **Bob Evans** pinned **Sonny Goodspeed** ... **Little Louie** pinned **Mighty Doom** ... **Reckless Youthbeat** defeated **Mike Quackenbush** ... **Adam Booker** pinned **John Roselli** ... **Brian Christopher** beat **Don Montoya** ... **Jerry "The King" Lawler** pinned **Tiger Khan**.
(10-05-02)

—Timothy A. Walker

PORTLAND— ME Eastern Wrestling Alliance at the Stevens Avenue Armory: **Nick McKenna** & **Garf Garrison** beat **The Elements of Suicide** ... **Kid Krazy** beat **Tommy Heartbreaker** & **Dominik** in a handicap match ... **Don Juan DeSanto** beat **Rick Daniels** ... **Adam Hastey** pinned **Stephan Q. Ramsey** to win the EWA New England title ... **John Walters** beat **Chi Chi Cruz** ... **Dr. Heresy** and **Frankie Armadillo** beat **Brian Black** and **Johnny Curtis** ... **Rick Fuller** beat EWA heavyweight champion **Adam Booker**
(10-04-02)

—Jeff Marshall

Rob Eckos wanted to attack White Lotus before he got back into the ring here, but Lotus outsmarted him by using a sunset flip from the ring apron. Too bad it didn't get him a pinfall.

MASSACHUSETTS

NEW BEDFORD—Ultimate Championship Wrestling at the Moose Club: **Paco Riveira** beat **Dana Cama** and **The Convict** in a three-way match to win the vacant cruiserweight title ... **Gary Gold** beat **The Skunk** ... Tag team champs **The Real American Deal** beat **Danny Rotten** & **Widowmaker** ... **Volcano Vic** won a 12-man battle royal ... **Derek Destiny** pinned **Gino Martino** ... **Iceberg** pinned **The Punisher** ... **Ali Muhammed** pinned heavyweight champion **Travis Funk** to win the title.
(10-19-02)

—Angela Silveira

MINNESOTA

WEST ST. PAUL—Steel Domain Wrestling at the Armory: **Shawn Davari** beat **Austin Aries** ... **Scotty Zappa** beat **Red Lightning** ... **St. Holmes** beat **Travis Sharpe** ... **Adrian Lynch** beat **Big Daddy Hoofer** ... **Matt Burns** beat **Kevin Krueger**

Despite the fact that he executed a textbook side headlock on Jason Knight, Del Tsunami wasn't able to make many waves in his match with "The Sexiest Man On Earth."

... **Ken Anderson** beat **Mitch Paradise** ... **Lenny Lane** beat **Magnus** Maximus in a no-disqualification match.
(10-26-02)

—Nicholas Loken

MISSOURI

KANSAS CITY—WWE at the Municipal Auditorium: **Matt Hardy** pinned **Sho Funaki** ... **Bill DeMott** & **Crash Holly** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Bull Buchanan** ... **John Cena** pinned **Albert** ... **Billy Kidman** & **Shannon Moore** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Tajiri** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** beat **Edge** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** pinned **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **The Big Valbowski** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **D-Von** & **Ron Simmons** ... **Kurt Angle** pinned **Rikishi**.
(10-05-02)

—John Jamison

NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—Ultimate Wrestling Federation at the UWF Arena: **Papi Chulo** beat **Fredo Oreilly** ... **Major Maniac** beat Nevada champion **Legacy** ... **Rush** beat UWF champion **Butcher** to win the title ... **Kid USA** beat junior heavyweight champion **Brady A. Desire** to win the title ... ***Tough Enough 2's*** **Kenny** beat **Jimmy Daniels** ... UWF tag team champs **Mike Lane** & **Dave Powers** beat **Brother William** & **Kid USA** ... **Rush, Legacy,** and **The Butcher** defeated **Major Maniac, Jason Riggs** & **Brady A Desire** ... **X** beat **The Machine** ... **One** beat **Reggie** for hardcore title ... **The Law** beat hardcore champ **One** by countout ... **Mike Lane** beat **Iceman** ... **Jason Riggs** & **Johnny Rage** beat **Big Q** & **Dameon Dollaz**.
(10-25-02)

—Shaun Daily

RENO—WWE at the Lawlor Events Center: **D-Lo Brown** defeated **Raven** ... **Justin Credible** & **Steven Richards** defeated **Mark Jindrak** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Buh Buh Ray** & **Spike Dudley** beat **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** ... **Chris Jericho** beat **Jeff Hardy** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Goldust** ... Raw tag team champions **The Hurricane** & **Kane** defeated **Jamal** & **Rosie** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** pinned **Rob Van Dam**.
(10-06-02)

—Matt Brock

NEW JERSEY

WEST PATERSON—Independent Wrestling Federation at IWF Centre: **Brandon Young** pinned **Roman** ... **Axis** pinned **Travis Blake** ... **C.J. Summers** pinned **Shawn Donavan** ... **Kevin Knight** beat **Pierce St. John** & **Erik Andretti** in a handicap match ... **Johnny Toxic** & **Dan McGuire** beat **BPA Barry** & **Nik Rage**. ... IWF American champion **Hadrian** pinned **Damian Adams**.
(10-26-02)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

TOM'S RIVER—Phoenix Championship Wrestling at the Rec Station: **Khull** beat **Giavani Roselli** ... **Slayer** beat **Sonjay Dutt** by disqualification ... Tag champs **Prophet** & **Tiger Khan** beat **Mike Preston** & **Tank Tolland** ... **Chi Chi Cruz** beat **A.J. Styles** ... **Eric Justice** beat **Donnie Bonjovi** ... **Frankie Kazarian** beat **Chi Chi Cruz** ... **Yoda** won a monsters battle royal ... **Matt Vandal** beat **Rick Fuller**.
(10-19-02)

—Bobby Toberts

NEW YORK

ROTTERDAM—NY World Of Hurt Wrestling at the Draper Center: **Thornn** & **Steve Kruz** beat **Deliverance** ... **Bert Williams** beat **H.C. Loc** to win the heavyweight title ... **Jeff Starr** beat **Ricky Dominguez** to win the U.S. title ... **Vik Dalishus** beat **Kevin Dunn** ... **Jimmy Jact Cash** beat **Punk** ... **Johnny Kain** beat **Kid Krush** ... HC Loc beat **Jeff Starr** to win the U.S. title ... **Shockwave** beat **Nick Neighborhood** ... **Eric Everlast** wrestled **Texas Outlaw** to a double-countout. ... **Diablo Santiago** & **Oman Tortuga** beat **Moondogs Mutt** & **Mange** to win the tag team title ... **Danger** beat **Bert Williams** to win the heavyweight title.
(10-25-02)

—Mike Perry

BUFFALO—WWE at the HSBC Arena: **The Hurricane** pinned **Rico** ... **Batista** defeated **Justin Credible** ... **D-Lo Brown, R.C. Haas,** & **Mark Jindrak** beat **Redd Dogg, Raven,** & **Steven Richards** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Booker T** ... Intercontinental champion **Kane** defeated **Kurt Angle** ... **Jeff Hardy** beat **William Regal** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Jamal** & **Rosie** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Rob Van Dam**.
(10-13-02)

—Dan Murphy

ROCHESTER—WWE at the Blue Cross Arena: **The Hurricane** pinned **Rico** ... **Batista, D-Lo Brown,** & **Mark Jindrak** beat **Justin Credible, Redd Dogg,** & **Raven** ... **Jeff Hardy** pinned **William Regal** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Jamal** & **Rosie** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Ric Flair** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **R.C. Haas** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Goldust** ... **Booker T** pinned **Test** ... Intercontinental champion **Kane** pinned **Kurt Angle**.
(10-12-02)

—Roger Haywood

UTICA—WWE at the Memorial Auditorium: **D-Lo Brown** beat **Raven** ... **Mark Jindrak** defeated **Steven Richards** ... **The Big Show** beat **Goldust** ... **Booker T** beat **William Regal** ... **R.C. Haas** & **Batista** beat **Justin Credible** & **Redd Dogg** ... Intercontinental champion **Kane** beat **Test** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Jamal** & **Rosie** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Ric Flair**.
(10-11-02)

—Dan Murphy

NORTH CAROLINA

THOMASVILLE—NC New Empire Wrestling at the Flea Market: **Keith Austin** pinned **The Italian Assassin** ... **Corey Edsel** pinned **Brass Munkey** ... Tag team champions **Terrific Tony** & **Trent Wylde** beat **The Kamikaze Kid** & **Xsiris** ... **Alan Rage** beat **Kurt Solo** by submission ... **Brass Munkey, Rampage, Brad Stutts,** and National

The two top wrestlers in NWA-TNA at the time, NWA champ Ron Killings and TNA X division titleholder Syxx-Pac, took their feud quite a distance north of Nashville, but no titles were at stake. Good thing for Killings, as Syxx-Pac got help from Sabu to beat him.

champion **GeeStar** beat **Bounty Hunter**, **Corey Edsel**, **J-Money**, and **Sweet Diddy** in a no-disqualification match.
(10-20-02)

—Grant Sawyer

STEM—Southern Championship Wrestling at the Stem Fire Hall: **Kevin Matthews** beat **Spank** ... **Johnny Thundercloud** beat **Rico Rage** ... **Alexis Laree** beat **Valentina** ... **Major DeBeers** beat **Duke Richards** in a "loser leaves SCW" match ... **Zack Lee** & **Ben Black** beat **Ali Steele** & **Malaki** ... **Seymour Snott** beat **Natrone**.
(10-19-02)

—Gregory Mosorjak

WILMINGTON—ICW Pro Wrestling at the Armory: **Hangtime** beat **Tre-G** ... **Dark Star** beat **Mike Taylor** ... **Dave Renegade** beat **Deacon** ... **Lotus** beat **Hangtime** & **Tre-G** in a three-way dance... **Deacon** won a battle royal ... ICW champion **Marc Ash** beat **Flex Phenom** by disqualification.
(10-19-02)

—Marcus Watkins

OHIO

TOLEDO—WWE at the Sports Arena: **Mark Jindrak** & **Johnny Stamboli** beat **Justin Credible** & **Steven Richards** by disqualification ... **Batista** pinned **Redd Dogg** ... **Rico** beat **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Spike Dudley** & **The Hurricane** beat **William Regal** & **Lance Storm** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Kane** by disqualification ... **D-Lo Brown** pinned **Raven** ... **Trish Stratus** & **Jacquelyn** defeated **Molly Holly** & **Victoria** ... Raw tag team champions **Christian** & **Chris Jericho** defeated **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** & **Jeff Hardy** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Test**.
(10-27-02)

—Dominick Valenti

CINCINNATI—Northern Wrestling Federation at BoneKrushers Pro Wrestling Training Center: BoneKrushers champion **Zodiac II** pinned **Mack the Knife** ... **Chad Allegra** pinned **Ryan Stone** ... **Psycho Sam** pinned **C-Dell The Graffiti Kid** ... **Austin Meddler** beat **Danny Montgomery** by disqualification ... **Matthew Parks** pinned **The Warlock** ... **Jay Donaldson** beat **Dregen**.
(10-26-02)

—Kirk Sheppard

XENIA—Outlaw Championship Wrestling at the Blue Jacket Drama Center: Heavyweight champion **Tommy Blaze** beat **Chris McGraw** ... **The Giggler** beat **Gunner 6** by disqualification ... **Lodious** defeated **John Austin** ... Light heavyweight champion **Crazy J** beat **Matt Hart** ... **Wikid** defeated **Asylem** by disqualification ... **Big Jim** beat **Man Mountain** ... **The Wikiki Kid** defeated **Shawn Riot** ... Hardcore champion **Tow Truck** beat **Jamie Thunders** ... Tag team champions **Morris the Mecca of Manhood** & **Sensational Satin** defeated **Team CIA**.
(10-12-02)

—Bill Paulson

OKLAHOMA

TULSA—OCW at the OCW Arena: **Jeff Parsons** wrestled **Robert Drought** to a no-contest ... **Terry Montana** beat **Dexter Hardaway** in a hardcore rules match ... **Butch Dalton** beat aTV champ **Rocco Valentino** for the title ... **Luc LaPointe** beat **Brandon Groom** by disqualification ... **Amanda St. George** beat **Jenna Love** ... Light heavyweight champion **Outcast** beat hardcore champion **Shadow of Death I** in a non-title bout. ... OCW champion **Vinnie Valentino** beat **Beau Dalton**.
(10-05-02)

—Paulina Trock

PENNSYLVANIA

CANONSBURG—International Wrestling Cartel at Iceoplex in Southpointe: **Devil Bhudakhan** & **Glen Spectre** beat **Trevor Lowe** & **J-Ru** ... Sterling **James Keenan** pinned **Troy Lords** ... **Brian O** pinned **T. Rantula** ... **Ace Steel** pinned **Mike Preston** ... **Dennis Gregory** pinned **Jimmy Vegas** ... **Matt Vandal** pinned **Steve Stone** ... Tag team champions **Sexual Harassment** beat **M-Dogg 20** & **Josh Prohibition** in a TLC match ... IWC champion **Colt Cabana** beat **C.M. Punk**.
(10-19-02)

—Joe Dombrowski

PHILADELPHIA—Ring Of Honor at the Murphy Recreation Center : **Homicide** (without partner **Boogalou**) won a four-way match against **Joel** & **Jose Maximo**, **Divine Storm**, & **Special K** ... **The Christopher Street Connection** & **Allison Danger** beat **Joey Matthews**, **Christian York**, & **Alexis Laree** ... **Tony Mamaluke** made **James Maritato** ... **The Amazing Red** beat **Ikuto Hidaka** ... **Fast Eddie** beat **Don Juan** ... **Steve Corino** beat **Rudy Boy Gonzales** in a Texas death match ... **Low-Ki** beat **Samoa Joe** in a fight without honor ... **Prince Nana** beat **Elax** ... **Insane Clown Posse** beat **Mr. X** & **Y** ... **Jay Briscoe** defeated ROH champion **Xavier** in a non-title match ... **Loc** & **Devito** beat **Da Hit Squad** ... **Michael Shane** won a three-way dance against **Spanky** and **Paul London** ... **Christopher Daniels** beat **Doug Williams**.
(10-15-02)

—Meghan Redman

PHILADELPHIA—Combat Zone Wrestling at Viking Hall: **Nick Berk** beat **Josh Prohibition**, **Hurricane Kidd** and **Derek Frazier** in a gauntlet match ... **Greg Matthews** beat **Jon Dahmer** ... **Ian Knoxx** & **Chris Stylz** beat **Chris Cash** & **GQ** ... **Sonjay Dutt** beat **Ruckus** ... **Johnny Kashmere** beat **Nick Mondo** ... **M-Dogg 20** beat CZW/BJW junior heavyweight champion **Trent Acid** by disqualification. ... **The Messiah** beat iron man champion **Adam Flash** to win the title ... CZW champion **Justice Pain** wrestled **Nick Gage** to a no-contest.
(10-12-02)

—Peter Williams

POTTSTOWN—PWF at Academy Hall: **Rockin' Rebel** won a 15-man battle royal ... **Joey Matthews** beat **The Amazing Red** ... **Jason Palligrini** & **Brandon Blaze** beat **The Damned** ... **Trinity** beat **Simply Luscious** ... U.S. champion **Jay Briscoe** beat **Chi Chi Cruz** ... Xtreme champion **Jack Victory** beat **Striker** ... **C.W. Anderson** & **Steve Corino** beat **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** in a best-of-three-falls match to win the tag team title ... Universal junior champion **Quiet Storm** beat **Chris Devine** ... **Rockin' Rebel** beat Universal champion **Chris Hamrick** to win the title.
(10-13-02)

—Bryan Riegel

ALLENTOWN—CHIKARA at St. John's Auditorium: **Marshal Law** and **Love Bug** co-won a 10-man "Double Jeopardy" battle royal, which meant they had to face each other later in the show ... **The Wild Cards** beat **The Senior Assault Team** ... **D.J. Skittlez** defeated **Phantasmo** ... **Marshal Law** pinned **Love Bug** ... **Mike Quackenbush**, **UltraMantis**, **Dragonfly**, & **Gran Akuma** beat **Mister ZERO**, **Blind Rage**, **Ichabod Slayne**, & **Hallowicked**.
(10-12-02)

—Steve Palmer

It wasn't exactly Flair vs. Steamboat when Jasmin St. Claire and Missy Hyatt hooked it up in a mixed tag, though it was interesting. Jasmin and The Blue Meanie got the duke over Missy and Rockin' Rebel ... and minutes later, Jasmin turned against her beau.

TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Kid Kash** defeated **Tony Mamaluke** ... NWA heavyweight champion **Ron Killings** pinned **Scott Hall** ... NWA tag team champions **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **Cassidy O'Reilly** & **Chase Stevens** and **Chris** & **Rick Michaels** in a three-way match ... **B.G. James** defeated **Ron Harris** ... **Ace Steel** & **Bruce** beat **Jorge Estrada** & **Priscilla** ... **Jeff Jarrett** beat **Curt Hennig** ... **Sonny Siaki** defeated **Jerry Lynn** ... NWA-TNA X champion **A.J. Styles** pinned **Red**.
(10-30-02)

—Frank Miller

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Red** won a five-way elimination match, defeating **Jose Maximo**, **Elix Skipper**, **Joel Maximo**, and **Kid Kash**, to earn a shot at the X title ... NWA tag team champions **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **Cassidy O'Reilly** & **Chase**

Didn't Curt Hennig and Jerry Lawler feud over the AWA World title a decade or two ago? Indeed they did, and while both are past their primes, they tried almost every trick they knew before Lawler recorded the decisive three-count.

Stevens ... **Jerry Lynn** pinned **Sonny Siaki** ... **Scott Hall** pinned **Jeff Jarrett** ... **B.G. James** pinned **Brian Lawler** ... **A.J. Styles** pinned NWA-TNA X champion **Syxx-Pac** to win the title ... **Jorge Estrada** pinned **Ace Steel** ... NWA heavyweight champion **Ron Killings** defeated **Curt Hennig**.
(10-23-02)

—Steve Drew

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Brian Lawler** defeated **David Young** ... **Sonny Siaki** beat **Jorge Estrada** ... **Ace Steel** defeated **Derek Wylde** ... **B.G. James** & **Hermie Sadler** defeated **Jeff Jarrett** & **Bruce** ... **Ron Harris** beat **Norman Smiley** ... NWA tag team champions **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **Chris** & **Rick Michaels** ... **A.J. Styles** beat NWA-TNA X champion **Syxx-Pac** by disqualification ... NWA heavyweight champion **Ron Killings** pinned **Curt Hennig**.
(10-16-02)

—Frank Miller

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Curt Hennig**, **B.G. James**, & **Syxx-Pac** beat **Jeff Jarrett**, **Ron Killings**, & **Brian Lawler** ... NWA tag team champions **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** ... **Ace Steel** defeated **Kid Kash**, **Low-Ki**, and **Tony Mamaluke** in a four-way, 15-minute "Ironman" match ... **Chris** & **Rick Michaels** beat **Ron Harris** & **Sonny Siaki** ... **Low-Ki** beat **Ace Steel** by reverse decision disqualification ... **Syxx-Pac** won the held-up NWA-TNA X title (previous champ **Jerry Lynn** was injured earlier on the show) by defeating **Kid Kash**, **A.J. Styles**, **Joel Maximo**, **Jose Maximo**, **Tony Mamaluke**, and **Ace Steel** in a seven-way ladder match.
(10-09-02)

—Frank Krewda

HUNTSVILLE—Southern Wrestling Alliance at the Huntsville Middle School: Jay pinned The Stallion ... The **Butcher** pinned **Kid Homicide** ... **Wild Willie D** and **Jason Fear** beat SWA tag team champions **The FBI** to win the titles ... SWA U.S. champion **Big Bad Luke** pinned **The Diamond Studd** ... **Keith Kruise** pinned **Rage** ... SWA champion **Gabe Casteel** pinned **Jack Diamond**.
(10-26-02)

—Paul Ledbetter

KINGSPORT—Southern States Wrestling at the American Legion Hall: ***In a tournament to declare a new heavyweight champion: quarterfinals:*** **Scotty McKeever** beat **Joey Williams** ... **Jesse Taylor** beat **Brian Overbay** ... **Rick Karloff** beat TV champion **Ray Idol** by disqualification ... **Beau James** beat **Memphis Body Guard** by forfeit ***Semi-finals:*** **Jesse Taylor** beat **Scotty McKeever** ... **Beau James** pinned **Rick Karloff** ... ***Finals:*** **Jesse Taylor** beat **Beau James** for the SSW title.
(10-15-02)

—Fay Ferguson

TEXAS

CORPUS CHRISTI—NWA 54th Anniversary Show at The Memorial Coliseum: **Jacey North** pinned **Brother Love** ... **Ryan Pisiak** pinned **Dagon Briggs** in a hair vs. hair match ... **J.T. Wolfen** & **Sickdog** beat **Magnum** & **Ricky Murdoch** ... NWA Canadian champ **Spyder** pinned **Paul Tracey** ... **Biggie Biggs** pinned **Preston Quinn** ... **Jason Rumble** pinned **Rocky** ... **Steve DeMarco** beat NWA Texas champ **J.P. Black** to win the belt ... NWA-UK heavyweight champ **Johnny Moss** pinned **Danny Garnell** ... **Char Starr** pinned NWA women's champ **Madison** to win the belt ... **Jorge Estrada** pinned NWA North American champ **Paul Atlas** to win the belt ... **Konnan** pinned **Danny Dominion** ... NWA tag team champs **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **Rocky Reynolds** & **A.J. Styles** ... NWA heavyweight champion **Ron Killings** pinned **Hotstuff Hernandez** in a best-of-three-falls match.
(10-26-02)

—Rob Moore

DENTON—Texas Championship Wrestling at the TCW Arena: XCW tag team champions **Chance Romance** & **Zane Morris** pinned **The Flying Jobber** & **Jeff Brown** ... **Epi The Phat Samoan** pinned **Pendragon** ... **Jeff Brown** pinned **Bull** ... **Tyler Bateman** wrestled **Eric Idol** to a no-contest ... **The Professionals** beat **Hellraiser Hark** & **Seth Shai.**
(10-25-02)

—Gray Stokes

CRANDALL—Star Wrestling Federation at the SWF Arena: **Crash** beat **Dominique Leroux** ... **Ray Evans** beat **American Ninja** ... **Dave The Rave** beat **Bryan Justice** ... Cruiserweight champion **Scorpion** beat **Fair Kitty** ... **Cody Knight** beat **Widowmaker** ... **Big Poppa Jones** beat **Kris Kaos** for the vacant heavyweight title.
(10-19-02)

—Darren H. Evans

ODESSA—West Texas Championship Wrestling at CD's Lounge: **Mike Payne** & **The Atomic Punk** beat **Equalizer** & **Mace** ... **Mike Payne** pinned **Terry Pantera** ... **Mace** pinned **Damon Williams** ... Heavyweight champion **Equalizer** beat **The Atomic Punk**.
(10-12-02)

—Jerry Jenkins

SAN ANGELO—WWE at the Coliseum: **Sho Funaki** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Bull Buchanan** defeated **Bill DeMott** & **Crash Holly** ... **Albert** pinned **John Cena** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Tajiri** beat **Billy Kidman** & **Shannon Moore** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Edge** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** defeated **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **D-Von** & **Ron Simmons** beat **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **The Big Valbowski** ... **Rikishi** pinned **Kurt Angle**.
(10-06-02)

—Samuel Majors

VIRGINIA

NEWPORT NEWS—Virginia Championship Wrestling at Mitty's Nightclub: **Mike Booth** pinned **Chris Escobar** . ... **Malaki** & **Marchocias** beat **Buckwild** & **Logan Knight** ... **Steve Perez** pinned **Korie James** ... **Dirty Money** pinned **The Barbarian** ... VCW cruiserweight champion **Spank** pinned **Damien Wayne** ... **Bobby Eaton** & **Brandon Day** beat **Preston Quinn** & **Idol** ... **Phil Brown** pinned VCW heavyweight champion **Sean Lei** to win the title .
(10-20-02)

—Justin Russell

WISCONSIN

LADYSMITH—National Federation of Wrestling at the High School: **Dinn T. Moore** & **The Mysterious Webmaster** beat **Bobby Jay** and **Peter B. Beautiful** ... **Steve Cox** beat **Dean Richards** ... **LaPean The Dream** wrestled to a draw with **Hammer** ... **Rob Stardom** & **Ronnie Attitude** won a three-way tag team dance against **J-Real** & **Sonny Beach** and **Darkwolf** & **Havoc** to win the tag team title ... **El Vato** won a three-way dance against **Static** and **J-Rock** ... **Dr X** beat **Little Vader** ... **Tiny Tubbs** beat **Suicidal Youth** and **Davey Catell** in a handicapped match ... **Boogieman** won a four corners match against **Anicrusix**, **Mercenary**, and **B. Nakanaka** to win the U.S. title ... **Vegas** beat **Sean Stradlin** ... **LaPean The Dream** won a 25-man battle royal ... **Steve Stardom** beat **Jim Neidhart** ... **Red** Lightning beat **Lenny Lane** ... **Red Lightning** & **Darkchild** beat **Rob Stardom** & **Ronnie Attitude** to win the tag team title.
(10-19-02)

—Nicholas Loken

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

TORONTO, ONTARIO—Apocalypse Wrestling Federation at The Birchmount: **Slade** retained the AWF title against **Jaguar Vijay Singh** ... **Jackal** beat **Franky The Mobster** and **Piranah** in a triple threat match ... **Tony Mack** & **Kiki Malaya** beat **Gabriel Vice** & **Phoenix** ... **Joey Knight** beat **Arizona** by countout ... **James Champagne** and **Jerrick Miller** beat **Arizona** & **Joey Knight** ... **Asylum** defeated **Billy Flynn** ... **S.I.L.K.** & **Kevin Grace** beat **Zaquary Springate III** & **Vladimir Urkov** ... **Danny Dynamic** pinned **The Squeegee Kid**.
(10-27-02)

—Ron Hutchinson

SURREY, BRITISH COLUMBIA— ECCW/NWA Pacific Northwest at Bridgeview Hall: **Adam Firestorm** pinned **Vance** Nevada ... **Father Juan** beat **Toga Boy** and **Jimbo Richards** in a three-way dance ... **Todd Kelly** & **Grunt** beat **Memphis** & **Michael Raines** ... **Maddog Kimball** beat **Johnny Canuck** ... **The Cremator** beat **The Zombie** in a casket match ... **Scotty Mac** pinned **Moondog Manson** in a dog collar chain match ... **Skag Rollins** & **Seth Knight** beat Pacific Northwest tag team champions **Abbadon** and **Gorilla Marilla** to win the title ... **Rico Quiones** pinned Pacific Northwest champion **Ladies Choice** in a non-title match ... **Johnny Canuck** won a doomsday fans bring the weapons battle royal.
(10-25-02)

—Nathan Maylor

LONDON, ONTARIO—WWE at the John Labatt Centre: **Tajiri** pinned **Crash Holly** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Bull Buchanan** defeated **John Cena** & **Shannon Moore** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** pinned **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** beat **Edge** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match ... **D-Von** & **Ron Simmons** beat **Billy Kidman** & **The Big Valbowski** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Matt Hardy** ... **Rikishi** pinned **Kurt Angle.**
(10-14-02)

—Steve Drew

CALGARY, ALBERTA—WWE at the Pengrowth Saddledome: **Tajiri** pinned **Sho Funaki** ... **Harry Smith** pinned **Teddy Hart** ... **The Big Valbowski** beat **Bull Buchanan** ... **Billy Kidman** & **Shannon Moore** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **John Cena** ... **Lance Storm** beat **D-Von** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** defeated **Chris Jericho** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match ... **Christian** & **Edge** beat **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.**
(10-13-02)

—Garth Roman

EDMONTON, ALBERTA—WWE at the Skyreach Centre: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Tajiri** beat **Billy Kidman** & **Shannon Moore** ... **The Big Valbowski** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** ... **Sho Funaki** beat **Bull Buchanan** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Christian** beat **D-Von** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Chris Benoit** ... **Lance Storm** defeated **John Cena** ... **Torrie Wilson** defeated **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match ... **Chris Jericho** beat **Matt Hardy** ... **Edge** defeated **Eddie Guerrero.**
(10-12-02)

—Wayne Fenton

OLDCASTLE, ONTARIO—Border City Wrestling at the The Ciociaro Club: **Matrox** wrestled **Ash** to a no-contest ... **El Tornado** & **Tyson Dux** beat **Stevie Lee** & **Elvis Elliot** ... **The Hacker** won a six-pack challenge against **Trent Steele**, **Matrox**, **Original Sinn**, **El Fuego**, & **John E. Bravo** ... **Ruffy Silverstein** beat **The Hacker** ... **Scott D'Amore** & **Angel** beat **Simon Diamond** & **Felina** ... **Monty Brown** pinned **Yukon Braxton** ... **Petey Williams** beat **Derek Wylde** ... **Mike Legacy**, **A-1**, & **Petey Williams** beat **Derek Wylde**, **Eric Young** & **Larry Destiny** ... **Sabu** beat **Chris Sabin** ... **El Tornado** & **Tyson Dux** beat tag champs **Terry Taylor**, **Chris Sabin** to win the title ... Can-Am champ **Johnny Swinger** beat **Jerry Lynn** in a best-of-three-falls match.
(10-10-02)

—Brianna Degans

ENGLAND

SHEFFIELD—WWE at the Sheffield Arena: **Sho Funaki** defeated **Albert** ... **Bill DeMott**, **Shannon Moore**, & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **D-Von**, **Crash Holly**, & **Ron Simmons** ... **Billy Kidman** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **John Cena** pinned **The Big Valbowski** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** beat **Tajiri** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Kurt Angle** & **Chris Benoit** beat **Edge** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match ... **Booker T** & **Rikishi** beat **Matt Hardy** & **Brock Lesnar.**
(10-27-02)

—James Rainfeld

MANCHESTER—WWE Rebellion pay-per-view at the Manchester Evening News Arena: **Booker T** beat **Matt Hardy** ... **Billy Kidman** & **Torrie Wilson** beat **John Cena** & **Dawn Marie** ... **Sho Funaki** pinned **Crash Holly** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Tajiri** in an elimination match ... **D-Von** & **Ron Simmons** beat **The Big Valbowski** & **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Rikishi** beat **Albert** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Kurt Angle** & **Chris Benoit** beat **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Brock Lesnar** & **Paul Heyman** defeated **Edge** in a handicap match in which Edge could have won Lesnar's Smackdown title by pinning either one of his opponents.
(10-26-02)

—James Rainfeld

FINLAND

HELSINKI—WWE at Hartwall Arena: **Billy Kidman** defeated **John Cena** ... **Sho Funaki** & **Shannon Moore** beat **Albert** & **Crash Holly** ... **D-Von** pinned **Bill DeMott** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jamie Noble** pinned **Tajiri** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Booker T** ... **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Chuck Palumbo** & **The Big Valbowski** ... **Rikishi** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Kurt Angle** & **Chris Benoit** beat **Edge** & **Rey Misterio Jr.**
(10-24-02)

—Janne Kurri

IRELAND

DUBLIN—Irish Whip Wrestling at the National Basketball Arena: **P.N. News** beat **Neil Faith** ... **Pippa L'Vinn** defeated **Cleopatra** ... **Jake Roberts** pinned **Flatliner** ... **Jody Fleish** pinned **Johnny Storm** ... **Robbie Brookside** pinned **Joe E. Legend** ... **Doug Williams** beat **Slyk Wagner Brown** ... EWA champion **Chris The Bambi Killer** beat **Michael Kovac.**
(10-09-02)

—Gerard Bowes

Looks like Sabu could teach William Regal something about the power of the punch. He used his fists and finesse to end the title reign of 3PW heavyweight champ Gary Wolfe.

JAPAN

TOKYO—New Japan Pro Wrestling at the Tokyo Dome: **Blue Wolf** beat **Toru Yano** ... **Gedo** & **Jado** defeated **El Samurai** & **Wataru Inoue** ... **Tatsuhito Goto** & **Hiro Saito** beat **Takashi Iizuka** & **Shiro Koshinaka** ... **Masahito Kakihara**, **Jushin Liger**, & **Tiger Mask** beat **American Dragon**, **Ricky Reyes**, & **Rocky Romero** ... **Kenzo Suzuki** & **Hiroshi Tanahashi** beat **Minoru Fujita** & **Shinya Makabe** ... IWGP junior heavyweight champion **Koji Kanemoto** beat **Heat** ... **Tsuyoshi Kosaka** beat **Tadao Yasuda** ... **Yutaka Yoshie** defeated **Ryushi Yanagisawa** ... **Osamu Nishimura** wrestled **Bas Rutten** to a 30-minute draw ... **Kazunari Murakami** beat **Masayuki Naruse** ... **The Great Muta** pinned **Hiroyoshi Tenzan** ... **Masa Chono** pinned **Joanie Laurer** ... **Bob Sapp** defeated **Manabu Nakanishi** by countout ... IWGP heavyweight champion **Yuji Nagata** defeated **Kazuyuki Fujita.**
(10-14-02)

—Koichi Yoshizawa

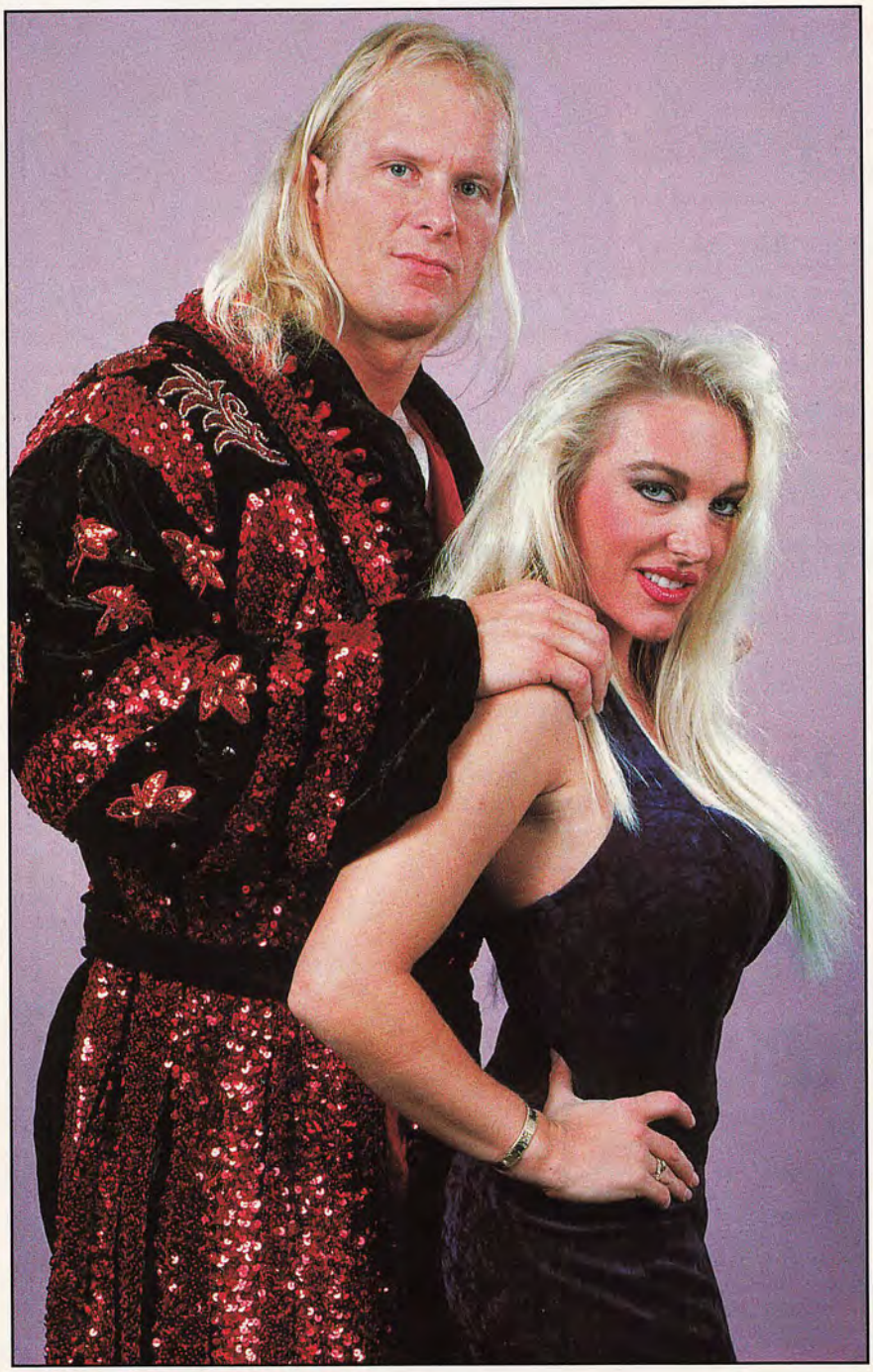
NORTHERN IRELAND

BELFAST—WWE at Odyssey Arena: Billy Kidman & **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **Jamie Noble** & **Tajiri ... Sho Funaki** & **Shannon Moore** beat **Bill DeMott** & **Crash Holly ... Booker T** defeated **Matt Hardy ... John Cena** & **Albert** beat **The Big Valbowski** & **Chuck Palumbo ... Rikishi** beat **D-Von ...** Smackdown tag team champions **Kurt Angle** & **Chris Benoit** beat **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr. ... Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie** in a bra and panties match **...** Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar beat Edge.**
(10-25-02)

—James Rainfeld

PWI classic

From the May 1992 issue of *Inside Wrestling*



NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

THE TRUE STORY BEHIND THE STEVE AUSTIN-LADY BLOSSOM SPLIT!

When voluptuous valet Lady Blossom vanished from the side of WCW TV champion Steve Austin, rumors ran rampant throughout the federation. But we stumbled onto the real story: Never underestimate the power of a woman!

By Chris Bernucca

OUTSIDE IT WAS unseasonably warm for the between-holiday lull of late-December in southern New York. But inside the lavish Scarsdale home of Paul E. Dangerously, the setting was considerably colder.

Dangerously sat forward in his high-backed leather chair, elbows resting on the oak desk in his fully carpeted den. A bright red carnation adorned the left lapel of his gray pinstripe suit. His tie was crimson, with

cream polka dots.

Madusa, wearing a shapely white jumpsuit with black pumps, ambled past the bookshelves on the walls. She wore her hair in a French braid and muttered authors' names in a barely audible whisper.

The LED window on the answering machine flashed a digital "15." There was a stack of mail six inches thick on Paul E.'s desk. And while the rest of The Dangerous Alliance rested at a midtown hotel, final arrangements still had to be made for that night's WCW card at the Byrne Meadowlands Arena.

A month ago, Paul E. had agreed to be interviewed when he arrived in the Big Apple. But a month ago, Paul E. didn't know he would be this busy. An intrepid intruder was the last thing the most powerful manager in the sport needed at the moment.

"You're just gonna have to bear with me, Shakespeare," snapped Paul E. "I was ready to hire someone to do this for me, but she didn't work out. Madusa's a big help, but when you're on the road, this stuff piles up."

He pressed the playback button on the answering machine and began sorting the mail into four piles—press releases, bills, junk, and personal letters. Yes, even yuppie rule-breaking managers get fan mail.

The messages droned on. Two from Magnum T.A., which made Paul E. laugh out loud. One from Jim Ross, which sounded important. One from the China Club. Two from friends in Atlanta. One from *Inside Wrestling* Editor-in-Chief Craig Peters. And then ...

"YOU SLIMEBALL! YOU KNOW WHO THIS IS! THE CHECK BOUNCED, YOU UNDERSTAND? IT BOUNCED! I WANT MY MONEY AND I WANT IT NOW! IN CASH!! IF I DON'T GET IT, I'LL GOUGE YOUR EYES OUT!"

There was no doubt about the identity of the shrill female voice. It was The Woman Scorned. It was Lady Blossom, former valet to TV champion "Stunning" Steve Austin.

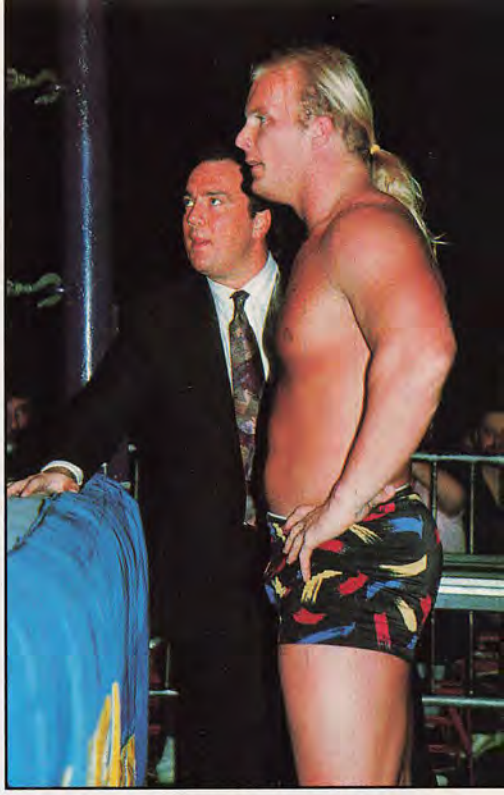
"All right, both of you, out!" said Dangerously, flipping through his Rolodex and rubbing his eyes. "I've got calls to make."

"C'mon, Hemingway," said Madusa, giggling. "I'll make us some tea."

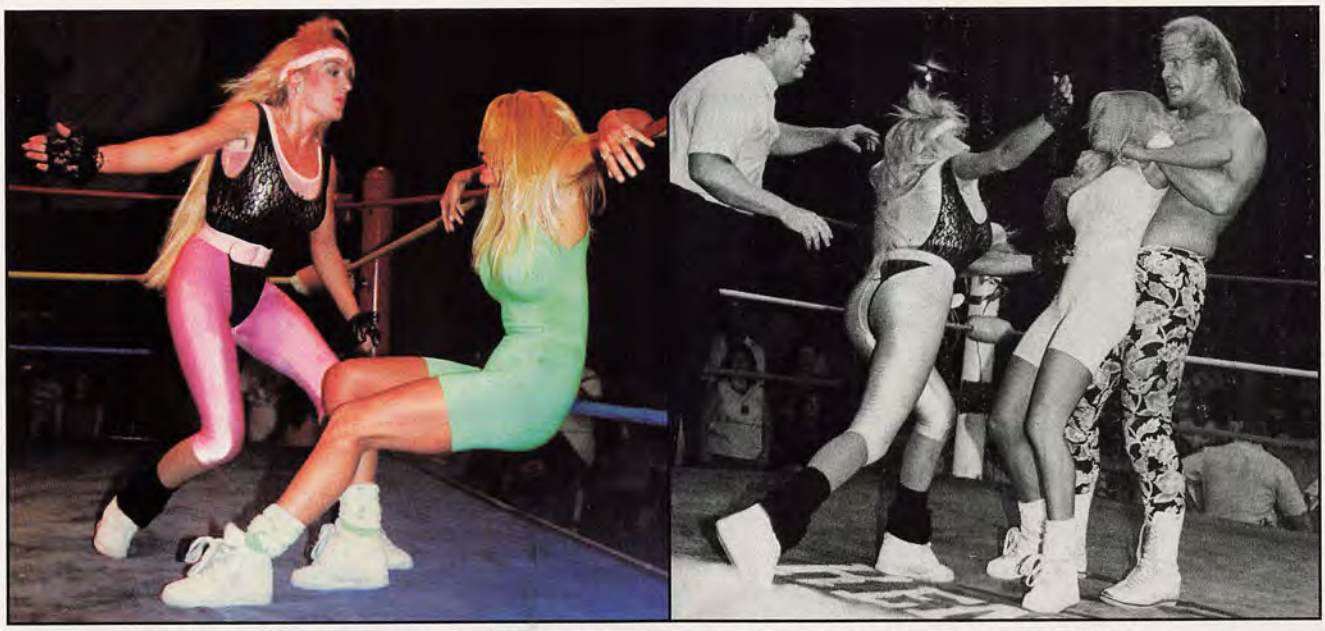
* * *

The kitchen was as spacious as the den. It had an eight-foot refrigerator, and island with a built-in range, and every modern convenience known to man. One began to wonder if Paul E. was bouncing his mortgage payments as well.

"You see," Madusa began, "when I joined the Alliance, one of the stipulations of my contract was that I have final approval on all other female potential members. When Paul went



Hooking up with manager Paul E. Dangerously was an important move in Steve Austin's professional life. However, he had to pay a price (and not a monetary one) to become a member of The Dangerous Alliance.



Blossom and Austin were a fantastic team both inside and outside the ring. Blossom got quite physical in her feud with Toni Adams in Texas (above left) before the two of them arrived in WCW, and Austin didn't mind lending the lady a helping hand (above right).

Kamala

Ratings

May 1992

TOP 15

1. Ric Flair
2. Rick Rude
3. Lex Luger
4. Roddy Piper
5. Steve Austin
6. Sting
7. Eddie Gilbert
8. Kamala
9. Ron Harris
10. Hulk Hogan
11. Charlie Norris
12. The Mountie
13. Ron Simmons
14. Tony Atlas
15. Randy Savage

TAG TEAMS

1. The Legion of Doom
2. Arn Anderson & Bobby Eaton
3. The New Foundation
4. Big Josh & Ron Simmons
5. Rod Price & John Tatum
6. The Moondogs
7. Rick & Scott Steiner
8. The Natural Disasters
9. The Bruise Brothers
10. Mr. Hughes & Big Van Vader
11. The Nasty Boys
12. The Freebirds
13. The Young Pistols
14. Hacksaw Duggan & Sgt. Slaughter
15. The Heartbreakers

WCW

World champion: Lex Luger

1. Rick Rude
2. Steve Austin
3. Sting
4. Ron Simmons
5. Rick Steamboat
6. Johnny B. Badd
7. Dustin Rhodes
8. Cactus Jack
9. Marcus Bagwell
10. P.N. News

WWF

World champion: Ric Flair

1. Roddy Piper
2. Hulk Hogan
3. Randy Savage
4. The Mountie
5. The Undertaker
6. Sid Justice
7. Bret Hart
8. Ted DiBiase
9. Tito Santana
10. Repo Man

MOST POPULAR

1. Sting
2. Hulk Hogan
3. Randy Savage
4. The Patriot
5. Jerry Lawler
6. Rick Steamboat
7. Bret Hart
8. Scott Steiner
9. Johnny B. Badd
10. Big Bossman

MOST HATED

1. Sid Justice
2. Rick Rude
3. Ric Flair
4. Lex Luger
5. Shawn Michaels
6. Cactus Jack
7. Steve Austin
8. The Mountie
9. The Dark Patriot
10. Eddie Gilbert

after Steve, he knew there was no way in hell that I would let that, that witch come along with him."

Her audience of one didn't dare interrupt.

"So he bought Austin's contract from Blossom," Madusa continued. "Paul knows that everybody has a price, even the holier-than-thou fools like yourself. People always say you can't buy happiness. Well, maybe not. But you can definitely *lease* it for a while."

The former champion checked her watch and smiled.

"That witch will be at the Meadow-

lands tonight, hangin' around the locker room like some groupie. She's absolutely pathetic.

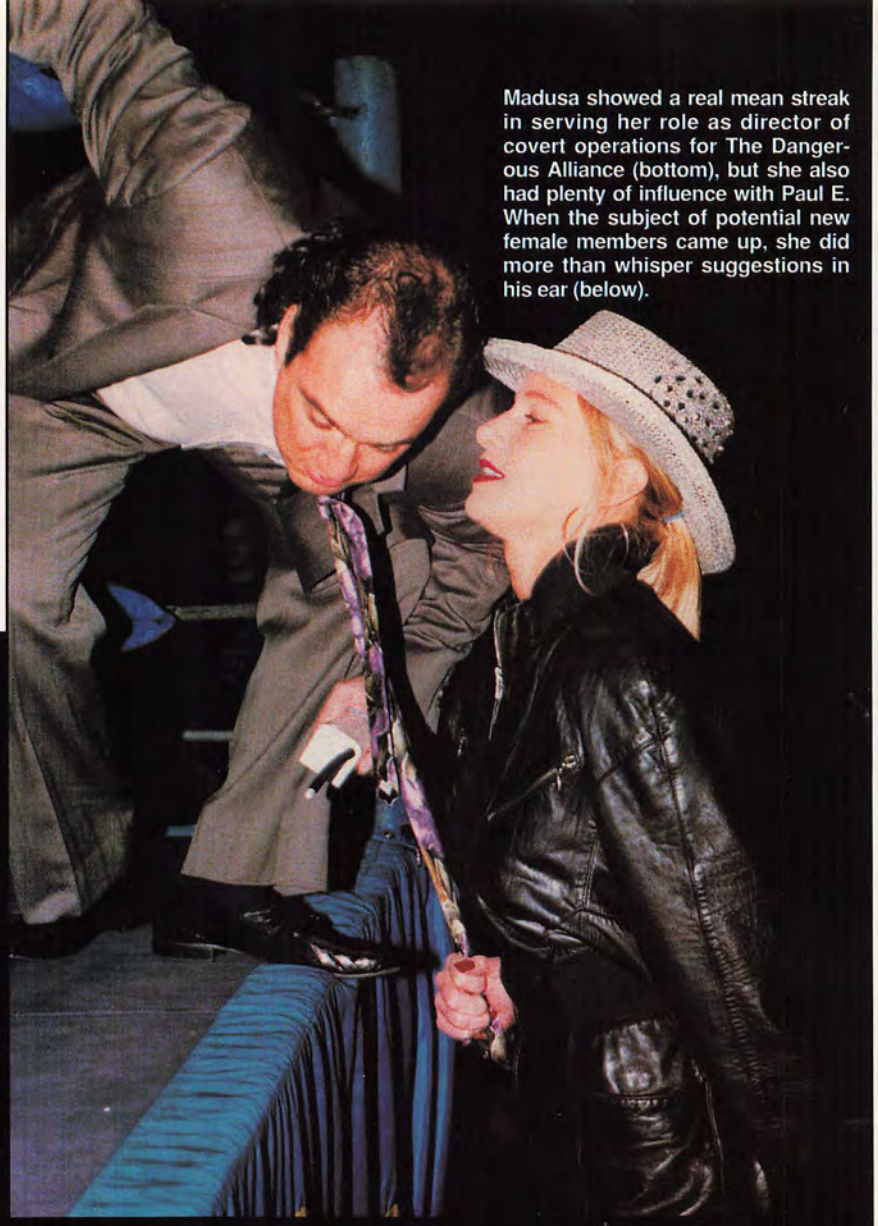
"I think you'd better go," she said, taking my coffee mug. "Paul's upset, and we've got a card to get ready for."

* * *

That night at the Meadowlands, Lady Blossom was there. Dressed in a waist-length fur coat, white miniskirt, and heels, she charmed her way past a security guard.

"What did I tell you?" Madusa said with a sneer.

The blonde beauty shared a pri-



Madusa showed a real mean streak in serving her role as director of covert operations for The Dangerous Alliance (bottom), but she also had plenty of influence with Paul E. When the subject of potential new female members came up, she did more than whisper suggestions in his ear (below).

Austin might not have been thrilled that he could no longer have Blossom as a manager, but the bottom line was he had to do what was best for his career.

vate moment with Austin, who earlier refused to discuss his change in management with the press. Minutes later, Blossom huddled with Paul E. in a barren corridor. Sharp words were exchanged, then Dangerously handed her a stuffed envelope. She thumbed through the contents and dropped the envelope in her white leather purse.

"You didn't see that," threatened Dangerously, who joined Madusa and headed for ringside.

Blossom headed for the exit. There was a hop in her step and a smile creased her lips. She tucked a 20 in the guard's breast pocket and gave him a kiss on the cheek, leaving a lipstick silhouette that would've made Johnny B. Badd proud.

"I asked Steve what it was like working for the second-smartest manager in WCW," Blossom said before leaving. "He said, 'C'mon, gorgeous, everyone knows Paul E. is the smartest manager in the sport.'

"So I said to him, 'Maybe, Steve. But let me ask you this: If Paul E. is so smart, how come he's paying me *not* to manage you?'" □

Inside Wrestling, May 1992

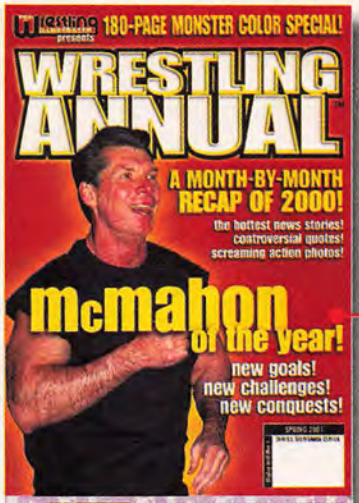
The cover: We made it clear what we expected from a Hulk Hogan vs. Sid Vicious match at WrestleMania VIII: We thought it would be a war! Hogan and Sid became friends when Vicious arrived in the WWF during the previous summer, but an incident at the 1992 Royal Rumble turned them into arch-enemies. Although we were correct in pointing out this match would be hyped every bit as much as the WWF title match at WrestleMania VIII, it turned out to be a dud that Hogan won by DQ.

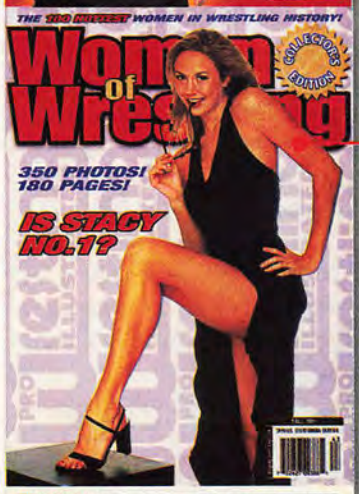
Search Warranted: Global Wrestling Federation officials had gotten so tired of seeing their TV champ, Eddie Gilbert, win matches after using weapons he had hidden somewhere on his person that they devised what they thought was a foolproof plan: They would have three fans search him before each match. The first time they tried, all three fans found weapons, but Gilbert outfoxed everyone by grabbing a weapon he had hidden under the ring to beat challenger Terry Garvin. Shrewd!

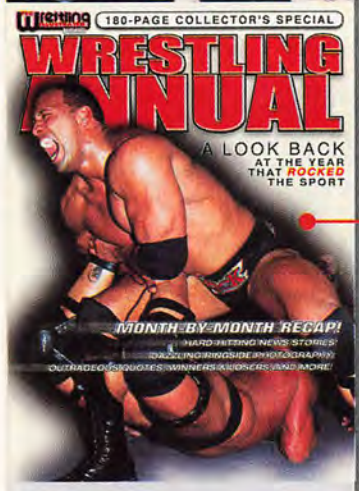
We Still Don't Know: We asked a very simple question in one feature in the May 1992 issue of *Inside Wrestling:* What is the future of independent wrestling? It was prompted by the recent decline of the Tri-State Wrestling Alliance (which no one knew at the time would be the precursor to ECW) and UWF. The article looked at an issue that promoters, insiders, and fans still debate today—whether it's smarter for new startups to promote established names or to try to cultivate new, younger stars.

"Thunder" Speaks: *Inside Wrestling* caught up with new WCW light heavyweight champ Jushin "Thunder" Liger just before he returned to Japan and put him on the "Hotseat." Liger was quite candid in the interview. In addition to talking about how much he enjoyed competing against Brian Pillman (the man he beat for the belt), he discussed his daredevil style, why he doesn't wrestle in fear of suffering a serious injury, and how much of a perfectionist he is.

Oh No, Repo: He was one of the more ridiculous WWF characters during an era rife with ridiculous WWF characters. Barry Darsow was Repo Man, the guy who loved to repossess the property of others, even when it wasn't in need of repossession. Despite the fact that Darsow was a three-time WWF World tag team champion as Demolition Smash, we predicted a lackluster career for him as Repo Man and didn't see any WWF titles in his future. Not surprisingly, our predictions came true.







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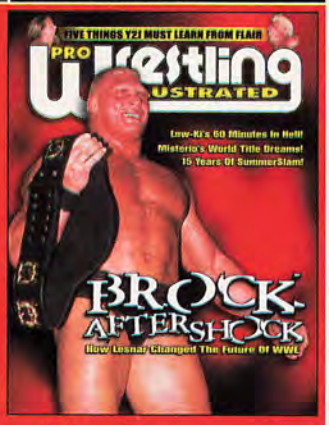
Or you can e-mail your comments to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com
Letters preceded by a ☎ indicate letters left by fans on the *PWI* Hotline (1-900-226-4PWI; see ad elsewhere in this issue).

TAKING STOCK OF BROCK, ROCK



We discussed the consequences of Brock Lesnar's WWE undisputed title victory at SummerSlam in our January 2003 issue and concluded that the fans in Uniondale, New York, gave Lesnar their stamp of approval at that pay-per-view. By doing so, did that mean WWE fans were expressing their disapproval of The Rock? The crowd reaction would suggest that … as would some of our mail.

"I, too, was surprised by the strong reaction to Lesnar," noted James Walken of Harlem, New York. "If I was surprised, and the viewers watching were surprised, then what were the New York fans thinking? I think all of us were subconsciously sick of The Rock double-dipping between WWE and Hollywood."

Reader Jean Stapp of Indio, California, disagreed. "WWE could be making a mistake if they read too much into the positive crowd reaction to Brock Lesnar," she wrote. "Everybody has wanted to boo The Rock for a while. It has nothing to do with Lesnar."

"Your article reminds me of a similar story you did on Goldberg winning the WCW World title four years ago," stated Conig Brunard of Greensburg, Indiana. "I hope Lesnar does better than him."

'TAKER: REAL NUMBER ONE

The Undertaker should have been number one in the *"PWI* 500" (December 2002) because he pinned Rob Van Dam twice during the evaluation period, and was pinned by RVD only once—and his foot was on the ropes that time.

While 'Taker had a few losses this year, not many of them were clean. He lost to The Rock because of Ric Flair's lead pipe, he lost to Maven because of The Rock's interference, and he lost the WWE undisputed title when The Rock pinned Kurt Angle in a three-way match.

Look at RVD's record. He lost to Eddie Guerrero twice. RVD was number-three in my book this year, behind The Undertaker and Kurt Angle.

ROBERT LESKI
Sonofafrog316@aol.com

BRING BACK D-LO!

I know it's not the hip thing to do, but I am a regular viewer of *Sunday Night Heat*. There, I can see my exiled favorites like Raven and Howard Finkel. It's kind of like the land of misfit toys. I also thought Jonathan Coachman and D-Lo Brown were an excellent broadcast team.

Then came Lita. I realize she's just beginning as a color commentator, so I should give her a break. But she sounds like a teenager who's too lazy to take the gum out of her mouth to talk. Lita doesn't add much insight and isn't very clever. I've always been a Lita fan. I know she's a great wrestler, and I thought she gave decent promos. But I truly believe color commentary takes a natural talent. You either have it or you don't.

I wish D-Lo would return to *SNH*. He was smooth and witty, and not in-your-face like Tazz or spouting dumb jokes like Al Snow.

Let Lita concentrate on her rehab. This just doesn't feel right.

JERRY SANGSTROM
Oklahoma City, OK

... SITTIN' IN A TREE

When Eric Bischoff appeared on the Halloween edition of *Smackdown* wearing a Vince McMahon mask, I thought it was going to be a typically mundane Eric-Stephanie segment. I almost choked on my daughter's trick-or-treat candy when Bischoff grabbed Stephanie and planted a big kiss on her … and she liked it!

Please tell me that Stephanie is pulling the same tricks as her dad. Vinnie Mac managed to kiss almost every WWE diva, including Torrie Wilson, Stacy Keibler, and Trish Stratus. He justified his actions by calling it a "performance."

Now Stephanie is doing the same thing with Bischoff. Has she secretly had a crush on Bischoff for some time and managed to

Lita can count reader Jerry Sangstrom as one of her fans. Well, he's a fan of her as a wrestler at least. He doesn't think she's good as a commentator on *Sunday Night Heat*.

include that little saliva exchange in the latest storyline? If Stephanie gets a crush on Crash Holly, will she find a way to kiss him on-camera, too?

It seems to me that the McMahons live vicariously through their "art" … because they can get away with things in front of the camera that they can't do behind it.

Not that Bischoff seemed to mind it.

LAURIE DUMAR
Lewistown, MT

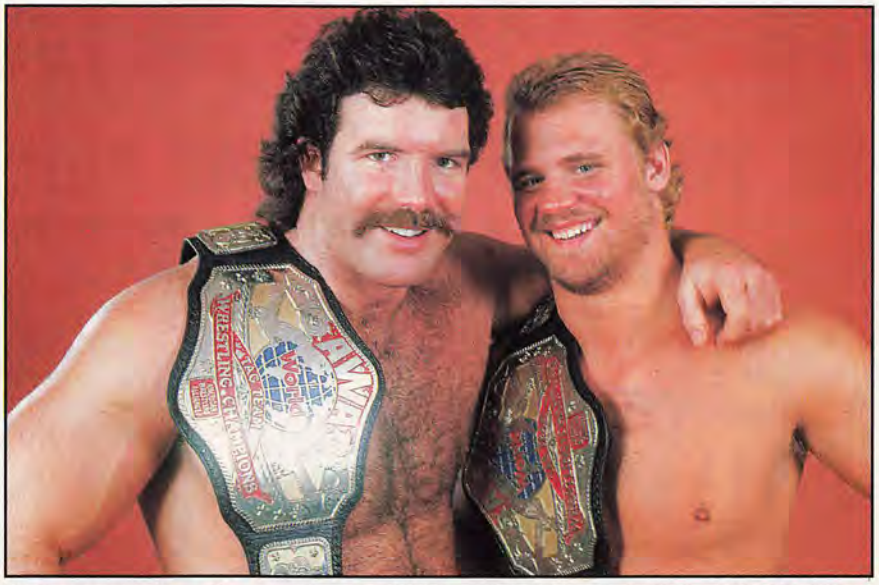
GREAT CORPORATE CITIZENS

Stu Saks raised an interesting point in his "From The Desk Of …" commentary in the January 2003 issue of *PWI*. At the beginning of his column, he gave a pop quiz, asking which of three corporate executives has a clean record. The choices were Martha Stewart, former General Electric Chairman Jack Welch, and Vince McMahon.

I knew the answer immediately: Vince McMahon. Although Vinnie Mac was accused of using anabolic steroids to pump up his wrestlers a few years ago, he hasn't used accounting steroids to pump up WWE's financial books. Despite this above-board conduct, the McMahons don't receive much credit for WWE's success or their clean financial record. Just once, I'd like to see Louis Rukeyser or some other CNBC host invite Vince or Linda McMahon on television for an in-depth discussion of the WWE product.

As for Martha Stewart, she's phonier than wrestling could ever be.

ABBA MORSE
Pascagoula, MS



It's been more than 16 years since Scott Hall and Curt Hennig held the AWA World tag team title together. Reader Chris Slatternugen thinks the time is right for a reunion in NWA-TNA.

REVOLUTION'S REVOLVING DOOR?

I was a big fan of OVW's original Revolution, which included "The Machine" Doug Basham, Queen Victoria, and Big Bad John. Now The Revolution seems to consist of Damaja, Jackie Gayda, and Johnny Spade. Sure, Doug Basham and Victoria drop in for occasional appearances, but it is obvious The Rev is trying to pass the torch to Damaja and company.

If Damaja wants a clique, he should start his own. People used to complain about The Four Horsemen's revolving door, but at least two core members always remained: Ric Flair and Arn Anderson. It would be better if Doug Basham took the Revolution concept to WWE and, as original members get the callup, they could join him there.

Now the word is that Damaja could be called up to WWE within the next six months to a year. If The Revolution stays in Ohio Valley, then who will become the leader?

This is getting ridiculous.

MAXWELL WEINO
Nebraska City, NE

REUNITE HALL AND HENNIG

Back in the mid-1980s, Scott Hall and Curt Hennig were my favorite tag team. I remember *PWI* touted them as the perfect blend of "style and substance." I thought Hennig was supposed to be the style, and Hall was the substance, but nowadays I'm not so sure. Personally, I think they're both solid wrestlers who have allowed personal demons to sidetrack them. Hall's problems with alcohol are well-documented, as is Hennig's addiction to practical jokes.

That is why WWE released both of them following an international flight last summer. Now they have both resurfaced in NWA-TNA. Hall needs to get away from Syxx-Pac and that whole NWO deal. If he's stuck in 1996, then why not go back to 1986, when Hall and Hennig were the AWA World tag team champions?

Hall and Hennig could beat Chris Harris and James Storm for the NWA tag team title with ease. And, Scott, don't forget the fuzzy boots!

CHRIS SLATTERNUGEN
Minneapolis, MN □

PWI Hotline Extra!

Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: Are you offended by the Raw brand storyline concerning Katie Vick? (October 22 to 28, 2002)

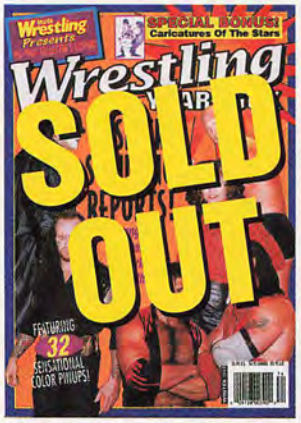
Hotline callers respond: "This is the kind of junk that gives wrestling a bad name," said Jason Alkins of Corvallis, Oregon. "Necrophilia? Isn't that as low as you can go? WWE has investors now, so Vince McMahon better watch it."

"Triple-H getting into the casket was tasteless, but it isn't any worse than other stuff in entertainment," noted Betsy Palmetto of Provo, Utah. "Consider how disgusting the Hannibal Lecter movies are, and kids do watch those, too. This is tame in comparison."

"I don't find sex with dead people to be entertaining," commented Daniel Ratburn of Chickasha, Texas. "I watch *Raw* to see wrestling, not garbage like that. McMahon is going to kill off *Raw's* ratings just like Kane killed Katie Vick."

WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING?



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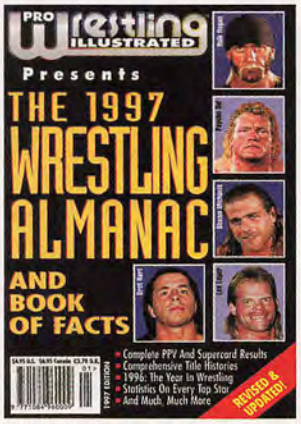

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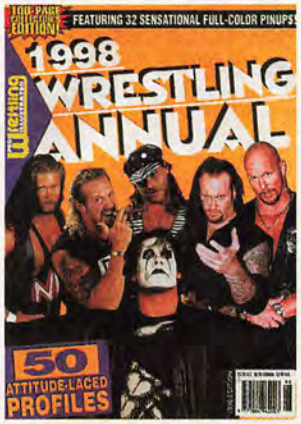

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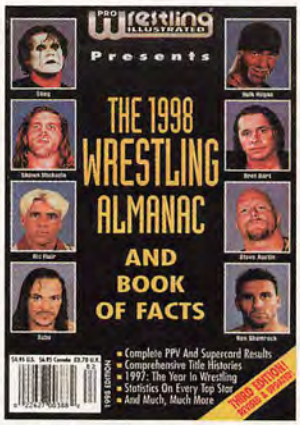

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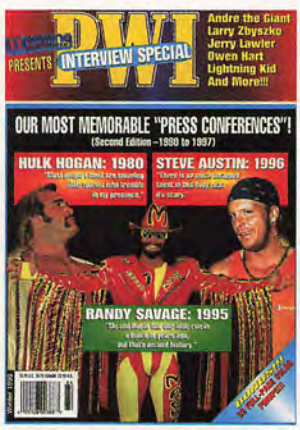

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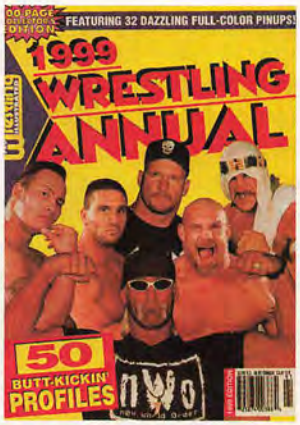

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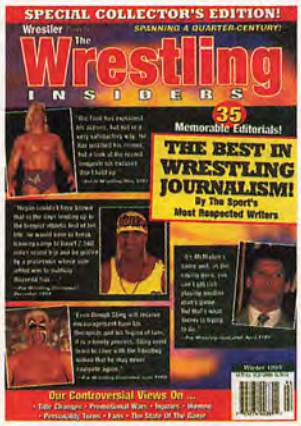

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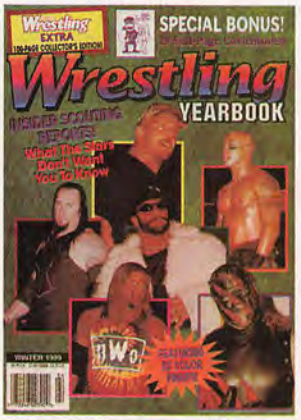

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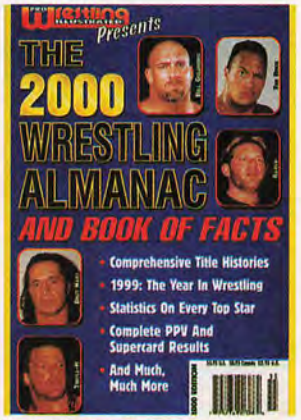

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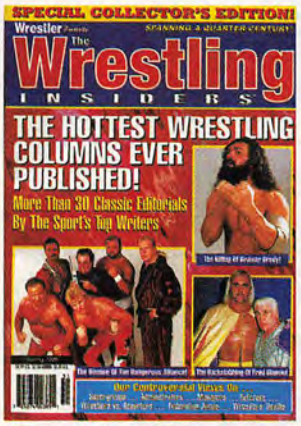

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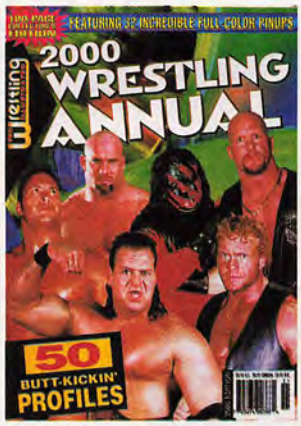

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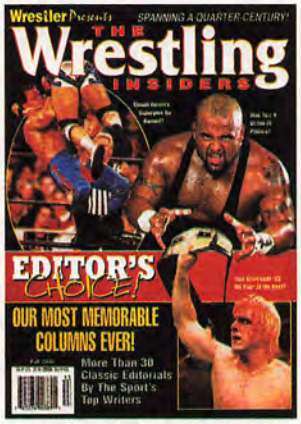

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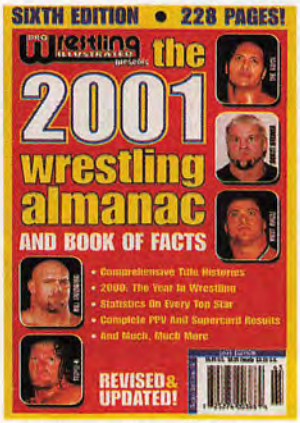

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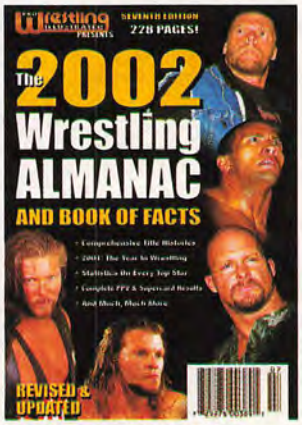

2002 WRESTLING ALMANAC
The seventh annual edition updates our historical records and takes a look back at the year 2001.

- ☐ 1997 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ PWI Interview Special (Vol. I)
- ☐ 1998 Wrestling Annual
- ☐ 1998 Wrestling Almanac
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- ☐ 1999 Wrestling Insiders (Winter '99)
- ☐ Wrestling Supercards
- ☐ PWI Interview Special (Vol. III)
- ☐ 1999 Wrestling Yearbook
- ☐ 2000 Wrestling Almanac
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PWI official ratings

For period ended November 10, 2002

TOP 10

1. **BROCK LESNAR**
   295, Minneapolis, MN
   (1) WWE Smackdown champion
2. **TRIPLE-H**
   269, Greenwich, CT
   (2) WWE Raw champion
3. **MITSUHARU MISAWA**
   228, Ashikaga, Japan
   (7) GHC heavyweight champion
4. **BOOKER T**
   250, Houston, TX
   (-) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
5. **THE BIG SHOW**
   485, Aiken, SC
   (-) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
6. **KEIJI MUTO**
   245, Yamanashi, Japan
   (-) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
7. **KANE**
   304, parts unknown
   (3) No. 2 contender: WWE Raw title
8. **RON KILLINGS**
   230, Charlotte, NC
   (6) NWA heavyweight champion
9. **EDGE**
   240, Toronto, Ontario
   (-) No. 2 contender: WWE Smackdown title
10. **ROB VAN DAM**
    237, Battle Creek, MI
    (8) No. 3 contender: WWE Raw title

The Big Show

TAG TEAMS

1. **CHRISTIAN & CHRIS JERICHO**
   Combined weight: 450 pounds
   (-) WWE Raw tag team champions
2. **EDGE & REY MISTERIO JR.**
   Combined weight: 403 pounds
   (-) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
3. **JUN AKIYAMA & AKITOSHI SAITO**
   Combined weight: 475 pounds
   (4) GHC tag team champions
4. **KURT ANGLE & CHRIS BENOIT**
   Combined weight: 457 pounds
   (7) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
5. **MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN**
   Combined weight: 505 pounds
   (2) IWGP International tag team champions
6. **CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
   Combined weight: 516 pounds
   (6) NWA tag team champions
7. **WILLIAM REGAL & LANCE STORM**
   Combined weight: 488 pounds
   (-) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
8. **EDDIE & CHAVO GUERRERO JR.**
   Combined weight: 408 pounds
   (3) No. 2 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
9. **JAMAL & ROSIE**
   Combined weight: 763 pounds
   (5) No. 2 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
10. **BUH BUH RAY DUDLEY & JEFF HARDY**
    Combined weight: 534 pounds
    (-) No. 3 contenders: WWE Raw tag title

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:
TRIPLE-H
(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

1—**BOOKER T**
(3) 250, Houston, TX
2—**KANE**
(1) 304, parts unknown
3—**ROB VAN DAM**
(2) 237, Battle Creek, MI
4—**CHRIS JERICHO**
(4) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
5—**TEST**
(10) 282, Toronto, Ontario
6—**GOLDUST**
(8) 263, Austin, TX
7—**BUH BUH RAY DUDLEY**
(5) 325, Massapequa, NY
8—**JEFF HARDY**
(6) 209, Cameron, NC
9—**RICO**
(–) 228, Las Vegas, NV
10—**CHRISTOPHER NOWINSKI**
(–) 236, Cambridge, MA

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:
BROCK LESNAR
(C) 295, Minneapolis, MN

1—**THE BIG SHOW**
(–) 485, Aiken, SC
2—**EDGE**
(3) 240, Toronto, Ontario
3—**CHRIS BENOIT**
(2) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
4—**KURT ANGLE**
(4) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
5—**RIKISHI**
(5) 424, San Francisco, CA
6—**JAMIE NOBLE**
(7) 190, Hanover, WV
7—**REY MISTERIO JR.**
(6) 163, San Diego, CA
8—**EDDIE GUERRERO**
(8) 223, El Paso, TX
9—**MATT HARDY**
(9) 213, Cameron, NC
10—**JOHN CENA**
(10) 260, Los Angeles, CA

OVW

OVW Champion:
NOVA
(C) 214, Bricktown, NJ

1—**DAMAJA**
(2) 251, Seymour, IN
2—**NICK DINSMORE**
(–) 226, Jefferson, IN
3—**DOUG BASHAM**
(1) 241, Louisville, KY
4—**ROB CONWAY**
(4) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
5—**R.C. HAAS**
(–) 265, Edmond, OK
6—**BADD DOGG**
(10) 240, Lafayette, LA
7—**MARK JINDRAK**
(6) 253, Auburn, NY
8—**RENE DUPREE**
(–) 250, Montreal, Queebec
9—**TRAVIS BANE**
(5) 285, Tombstone, AZ
10—**MATT MORGAN**
(8) 330, Fairfield, CT

HWA

HWA Champion:
MATT STRYKER
(C) 220, Cincinnati, OH

1—**CHET JABLONSKI**
(1) 230, Buffalo, NY
2—**B.J. WHITMER**
(2) 210, Owensboro, KY
3—**RORY FOX**
(4) 205, Watkins, IA
4—**CODY HAWK**
(3) 220, Malibu Beach, CA
5—**PSYCHO SARGE**
(6) 210, Camp Lejeune, NC
6—**THE HUSSLA**
(10) 185, North Dayton, OH
7—**MATT DILLINGER**
(7) 203, Rockdale, TN
8—**BROTHER CLAY**
(8) 225, Memphis, TN
9—**HOSS**
(–) 218, Cincinnati, OH
10—**NIGEL McGUINNESS**
(5) 220, London, England

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

ALL PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Larry Blackwell; **1**—Robert Thompson; **2**—Super Dragon; **3**—Jardi Frantz; **4**—Nikki; **5**—James Watkins; **6**—Bobby Quance; **7**—Vic Grimes; **8**—Kryptonite; **9**—Kafu; **10**—Psycho Seth.

APOCALYPSE WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Slade; **1**—Jaguar Vijay Singh; **2**—Jerrick Miller; **3**—S.I.L.K.; **4**—James Champagne; **5**—Asylum; **6**—Kevin Grace; **7**—Arizona; **8**—Joey Knight; **9**—Billy Flynn; **10**—Jackal.

CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Mongoose; **1**—Terry Alan; **2**—Bo Johnson; **3**—Jimmy Valiant; **4**—Tommy Green; **5**—Syxe; **6**—Shane Lewis; **7**—Jad T. Lungini; **8**—Miss Diamond; **9**—Maddawg; **10**—Skip Sherwood.

CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Johnny Graham; **1**—Shane Shadows; **2**—Greg Valentine; **3**—Doug Delicious; **4**—Brock Singleton; **5**—Mason Hunter; **6**—Bob Keller; **7**—Brian Johnson; **8**—Switchblade; **9**—Demolition Ax; **10**—John Balsamo.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Red; **1**—Japanese Pool Boy; **2**—Prince Nana; **3**—Cheetah Master; **4**—Low-Ki; **5**—Xavier; **6**—Striker; **7**—Johnny Heartbreaker; **8**—Mr. Ooh La La; **9**—Mozart Fontaine; **10**—Rob Eckos.

INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Biggie Biggs; **1**—Hadrian; **2**—Kevin Knight; **3**—Roman; **4**—Damian Adams; **5**—Marc Verow; **6**—The Patriot; **7**—Erik Andretti; **8**—Pierce St. John; **9**—Shawn Donavan; **10**—Salvatore Sincere.

KEYSTONE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Big Lenny; **1**—Matt Vandal; **2**—Kasanova Kato; **3**—Sebastian; **4**—Xander Graves; **5**—Mercury Flash; **6**—Sheik Abdul Hasaan; **7**—Dave Daniels; **8**—Dr. Feelgood; **9**—Zubov; **10**—Brock Singleton.

OKLAHOMA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Vinnie Valentino; **1**—Outcast; **2**—Rocco Valentino; **3**—Brian Lakewood; **4**—Big Daddy Moore; **5**—Michael Faith; **6**—Anthony Jackson; **7**—Karl Davis; **8**—Terry Montana; **9**—Justin Lee; **10**—Brandon Groom.

RHODE ISLAND WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Danger Boy Alfredo; **1**—Wolverine; **2**—Lee Norfolk; **3**—Mael; **4**—Danny Boy O'Callahan; **5**—Bill Thomas; **6**—Derek Greenlee; **7**—Lord Davios; **8**—Jason Rumble; **9**—Trooper Gilmore; **10**—Romie McFarland.

SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSIP WRESTLING: Champion—Jimmy Cicero; **1**—C.W. Anderson; **2**—Seymour Snott; **3**—Dan Rage; **4**—Dewey Cheatum; **5**—Malaki; **6**—Major DeBeers; **7**—Ali Steele; **8**—Lazz; **9**—Brent Rage; **10**—Otto Schwanz.

TEXAS CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Krusher Kong; **1**—Action Jackson; **2**—Hellraiser Hark; **3**—Epi The Phat Samoan; **4**—Zane Morris; **5**—Chance Romance; **6**—Gabe Roach; **7**—Gary Tool; **8**—Gemini; **9**—Brad Michaels; **10**—Seth Shai.

XTREME PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Shane Douglas; **1**—Kaos; **2**—Supreme; **3**—Altar Boy Luke; **4**—Pogo the Clown; **5**—Vic Grimes; **6**—Psicosis; **7**—Danny Doring; **8**—Juventud Guerrera; **9**—Chris Hamrick; **10**—The Sandman.

NWA

NWA Champion:
RON KILLINGS
(C) 230, Charlotte, NC

1—HOTSTUFF HERNANDEZ
(1) 280, Houston, TX
2—JORGE ESTRADA
(–) 225, Memphis, TN
3—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(6) 287, Gifu, Japan
4—A.J. STYLES
(3) 202, Gainesville, GA
5—DAN SEVERN
(5) 262, Coldwater, MI
6—JOHNNY MOSS
(7) 240, Egremont, England
7—SPYDER
(8) 225, New York, NY
8—JACEY NORTH
(–) 189, New Orleans, LA
9—DAVID YOUNG
(–) 246, Memphis, TN
10—KEN SHAMROCK
(2) 249, San Bernardino, CA

NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:
RON KILLINGS
(C) 230, Charlotte, NC

1—JERRY LYNN
(3) 216, Minneapolis, MN
2—A.J. STYLES
(2) 202, Gainesville, GA
3—JEFF JARRETT
(4) 230, Nashville, TN
4—B.G. JAMES
(7) 261, Marietta, GA
5—SYXX-PAC
(1) 221, Minneapolis, MN
6—CURT HENNIG
(8) 242, Minneapolis, MN
7—KID KASH
(9) 202, Johnson City, TN
8—BRIAN LAWLER
(6) 230, Memphis, TN
9—SCOTT HALL
(–) 290, Miami, FL
10—JORGE ESTRADA
(–) 225, Memphis, TN

JAPAN

1—MITSUHARU MISAWA
(2) 228, Ashikaga, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
2—KEIJI MUTO
(4) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion
3—YUJI NAGATA
(3) 228, Tokyo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
4—KOJI KANEMOTO
(6) 205, Osaka, Japan
5—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(–) 270, Sapporo, Japan
6—GENICHIRO TENRYU
(1) 235, Tokyo, Japan
7—JUN AKIYAMA
(5) 225, Hiroshima, Japan
8—MASA CHONO
(7) 235, Tokyo, Japan
9—BILL GOLDBERG
(–) 283, Tulsa, OK
10—KENDO KA SHIN
(9) 195, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

1—HECTOR GARZA
(1) 220, Monterrey, Mexico
AAA heavyweight champion
2—UNIVERSO DOS MIL
(2) 240, Mexico City, Mexico
CMLL heavyweight champion
3—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(3) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
4—MR. AGUILA
(–) 212, Guadalajara, Mexico
5—FELINO
(6) 165, Mexico City, Mexico
6—BLACK TIGER
(5) 193, Mexico City, Mexico
7—PERRO AGUAYO JR.
(–) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico
8—LATIN LOVER
(9) 190, Monterrey, Mexico
9—TARZAN BOY
(4) 218, Mexico City, Mexico
10—EL DANDY
(–) 202, Mexico City, Mexico

ratings analysis

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 22 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important–and respected–ratings system in the sport. This column is vital reading for all wrestling fans.

Finally, The Book gets his chance? People have been touting him as a potential major player in WWE since he arrived at King of the Ring 2001 and attacked **Steve Austin**. But 18 months have passed since that time, and it's still not clear when or if **Booker T** will get his chance to be a true main-event player in the company.

Booker T

The good news is, it looks like his time *might* be coming soon, maybe even by the time you read this column.

Booker picked up arguably the biggest win of his career since he captured his last WCW World heavyweight title when he pinned reigning Raw champ **Triple-H** in a tag team match on live TV in early-November. It was an important boost for The Book leading up to the six-way "Elimination Chamber" match for Triple-H's Raw title at Survivor Series. Crowd reaction the last few months suggests that people want Booker to get his shot at "running with the ball" for the Raw brand.

You could argue that Booker T had a run as a main-event player immediately after he arrived in WWE, but his feud with **The Rock** in 2001 was rather lopsided. He was treated as a total Rock wannabe back then, to the point that few were able to accept him as a serious threat to The Rock. Entertaining, yes, but not particularly dangerous. That became crystal-clear one month after Rock beat Booker to win the WCW championship at SummerSlam 2001. At the next pay-per-view, Unforgiven, Booker had his pal **Shane McMahon** on his side in a handicap match and *still* couldn't beat The Rock. Worse yet, he was the man Rock pinned to emerge victorious, not Shane.

The ratings on the previous two pages of this magazine reflect just how well Booker has been doing of late (he's ranked number four in the Top 10 and is listed as the top contender to the Raw title). We can only hope that WWE has taken notice of this and will continue to push Booker accordingly. It wasn't all that long ago that **Rob Van Dam** was the hot wrestler on the Raw side. He was moving up the ranks quickly, hearing all the cheers, creating a huge buzz, and he seemed poised to unseat "The Game." He, too, pinned Triple-H in tag team competition en route to earning a shot at his title.

Unfortunately for RVD, Triple-H made good on his promise to beat him at Unforgiven, and Van Dam has cooled off quite a bit since. Let's hope the same kind of thing doesn't happen to Booker T. Let's hope "The Game" doesn't allow the same thing to happen to Booker T.

Solid, dependable redneck. You'll have to wait until January 21 (you might find a copy a few days earlier if you're lucky) to find out who won the *PWI* Achievement Awards for 2002, but we can tell you that judging from the early returns, one champion who isn't likely to be among the top four vote-getters for Wrestler of the Year is WWE cruiserweight titleholder **Jamie Noble**.

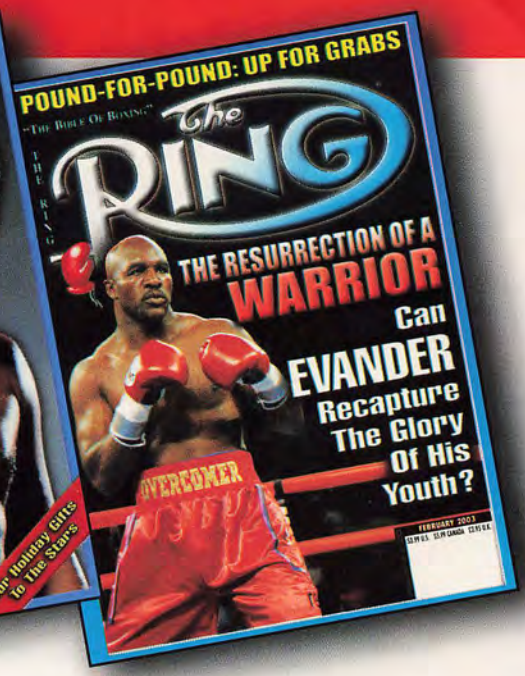
Jamie Noble

We're not suggesting that he should be strongly considered. After all, he doesn't even make our Top 10 every month. Considering all the positive reviews *Smackdown* has received in recent months, and the fact that there are so many world-class heavyweight wrestlers on that roster, it can be easy to overlook Noble and even his exhibitionist girlfriend, **Nidia**.

However, as of press time for this issue, Noble had been champion of the cruiserweight division for nearly five full months. As a point of comparison, Brock Lesnar, who dominated WWE for most of 2002, won the undisputed WWE title two full months after Noble became cruiser champ. And the now-defunct European, hardcore, and Intercontinental titles all changed hands after Noble beat **The Hurricane** for his title. A five-month title reign in today's WWE (especially for an unheralded newcomer) is a huge accomplishment.

Noble will never be a main-eventer in WWE, and he might never get in the mix with the big boys, but he has developed into a strong anchor for a strong cruiserweight division, and he has done so rather quietly. Along the way, he has recorded impressive and entertaining wins (you have to love his redneck/trailer park trash routine!) over the likes of **Rey Misterio Jr.**, **Tajiri**, **Shannon Moore**, and **Crash Holly**. Check out the April 2003 issue of *PWI* to see if he at least finishes strong in Most Improved Wrestler of the Year balloting. It looks like he will. And he might just end up as a very deserving winner in that category.

That's all we have! As always, if you have any questions or comments regarding our ratings or what you see here, we want to hear from you. Write to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. □



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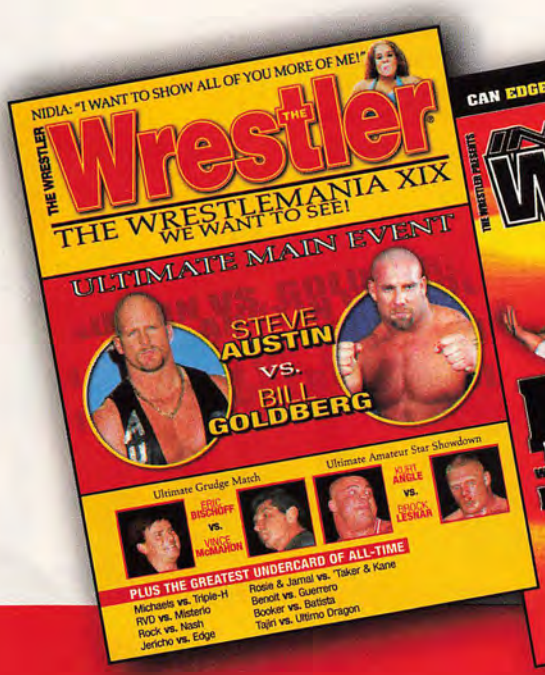

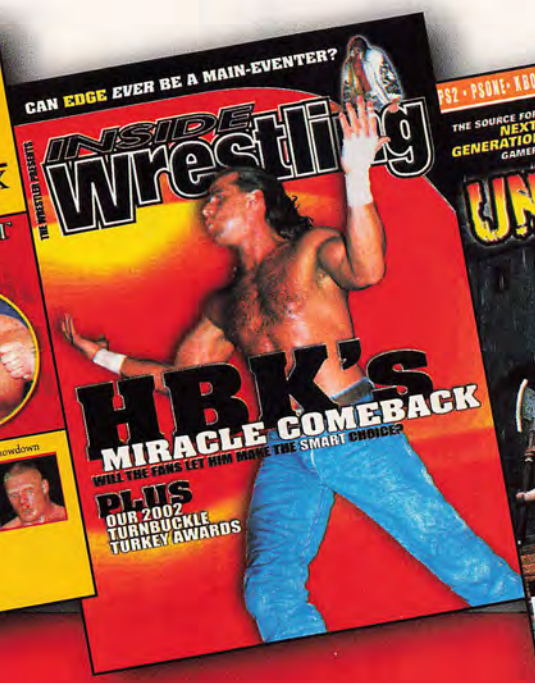

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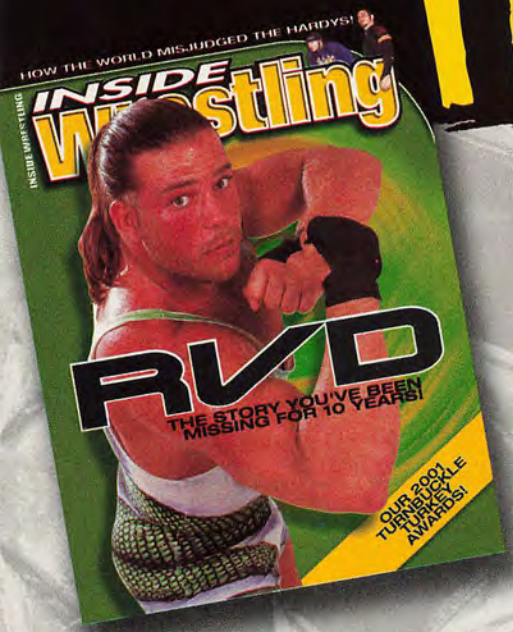

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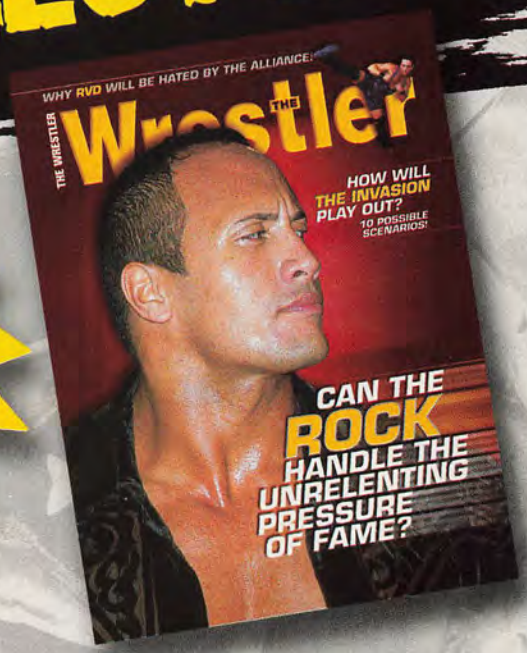

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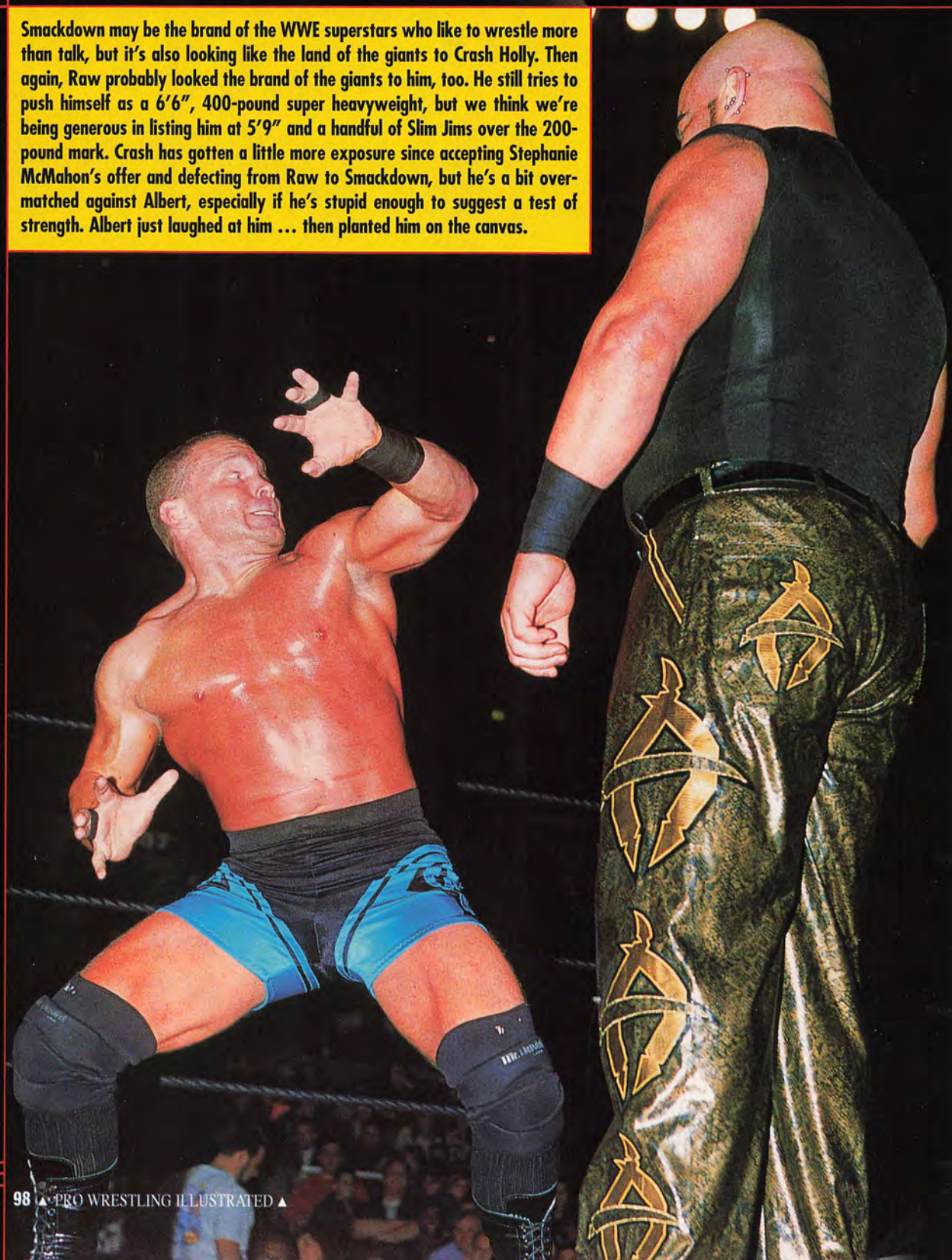
Smackdown may be the brand of the WWE superstars who like to wrestle more than talk, but it's also looking like the land of the giants to Crash Holly. Then again, Raw probably looked the brand of the giants to him, too. He still tries to push himself as a 6'6", 400-pound super heavyweight, but we think we're being generous in listing him at 5'9" and a handful of Slim Jims over the 200-pound mark. Crash has gotten a little more exposure since accepting Stephanie McMahon's offer and defecting from Raw to Smackdown, but he's a bit overmatched against Albert, especially if he's stupid enough to suggest a test of strength. Albert just laughed at him ... then planted him on the canvas.



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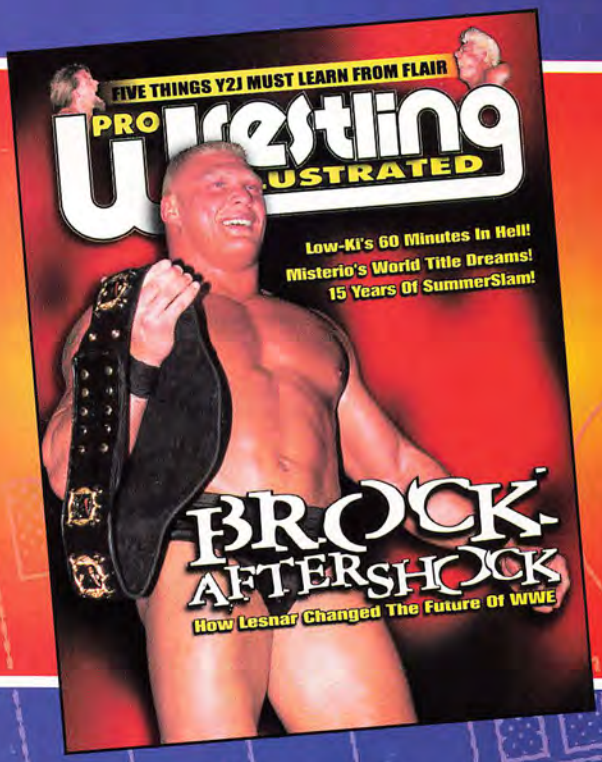

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